THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

EXPERIENCES OF CHRONIC PROCRASTINATION

by

ERIK WIKMAN ©

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

Department of Educational Psychology

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Fall, 2001

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled EXPERIENCES OF CHRONIC PROCRASTINATION submitted by ERIK CHARLES WIKMAN in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY.

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Abstract

Although procrastination has occurred frequently over the past decades, it appears to have existed in ancient times and does not seem to be culturally limited. It is only recently that procrastination has begun to be well researched. Current research studies suggest that procrastination is a substantial, self-perceived problem for between 20-30% of college students. However, relatively few studies have examined the incidence of chronic procrastination in the general adult non-student population. Recent research has suggested that procrastination may be a fairly common phenomenon for about one in five adults.

This study expanded on the existing qualitative research as it examined the phenomenon of chronic procrastination in adults, from the experience of individuals who were self-identified as chronic procrastinators. Those who define themselves as chronic procrastinators perceive themselves as different, as plagued not only by their tendency to delay, but also from the negative consequences of their actions that impact on personal, interpersonal, and occupational areas. Research methodology for this study was drawn from humanistic psychology's qualitative research paradigm using heuristic methodological processes with five adult participants. The participants consisted of three males and two females, ranging in age from 27 to 56 years. Occupations reported by the participants included student, actor, health care worker, counsellor, and government employee. Individual interviews with participants were conducted to develop an understanding of chronic procrastination. Each taped interview was transcribed and examined for inherent thematic structures. Ultimately, six themes of (1) time, (2) deadlines, (3) avoidance, (4) expectations, (5) emotion, and (6) interpersonal consequences were identified as constituting the experience of chronic procrastination.

An historical and theoretical overview of procrastination including current treatment and intervention methods is reviewed. Two reflective portraits from the author's and a participant's experiences of chronic procrastination are included. Further

research implications are provided. Finally, following the heuristic method, the creative synthesis for this study culminated in a recorded piece of instrumental music entitled, "The Experience of the Chronic Procrastinator".

Acknowledgments

It is very difficult to sum up in a few brief words the appreciation I feel for the encouragement, support, and guidance I have received from those who have been a part of this project. In particular, I would like to offer thanks to Dr. B. Paulson, Dr. A. Vander Well, Dr. H. Janzen, Dr. R. Everall, and Dr. D. Sande, my advisors and committee members, for their interest in my research, confidence in me, and their invaluable expertise and input in the formulation of this study. Their warmth, patience, belief and unconditional regard helped prove the difference between my endlessly seeking completion and actually realizing it. Teachers in the most honoured sense of the word, they have enriched my graduate years and my life immeasurably. I am also extremely grateful to Dr. M. Westwood, my external reviewer, for his support, suggestions, and questions. Finally, I am again very grateful to Dr. R. Everall. Thank you for understanding the awkwardness of my pace during this study, for inspiring me to work hard, and for being my friend.

My wife, Laurie, has been equally invaluable, tremendously patient, kind, and loving. Present as an adamant believer, resilient advocate and clearheaded realist, Laurie's judgment and concrete behavioural suggestions facilitated my completing this project one step at a time. I'd also like to thank my mother, father, and brother, Judith, Larry and Jason, without whom this effort would not have been possible. Their presence in my life allowed me to believe in myself and supported me throughout this study.

Finally, special thanks are extended to the men and women who participated in this study and gave so generously of their time and life experiences, in order to make this project possible. Their enthusiasm for this study sustained me and gave me a sense of privilege for having known them. They have enabled me to move forward in my life.

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CHAPTER ONE

Experiences of Chronic Procrastination

> Procrastination is not merely a curious human aberration, one of the many instances in which people failed to pursue their interest in an efficient and productive manner. It represents a dysfunction of human abilities that are important, if not essential, for coping with the myriad of tasks, major or minor, that accumulate daily on our desks, in our memo books, or in our minds ... When we procrastinate we waste time, miss opportunities, and do not live authentic lives ... (Milgram, 1991, p. 149).

Introduction

Procrastination seems to be an age-old problem described by literary figures and investigated by researchers. One of the earliest commentaries came from the Greek poet Hesiod, 2800 years ago, who wrote of procrastination as symptomatic of human frailty: "The procrastinating man is ever struggling with ruin" (cited in Quarton, 1992, p. 4). Another observation of procrastination is described by the Roman Stoic philosopher, Seneca, who noted that, "While we are postponing, life speeds by" (cited in Quarton, 1992, p. 4). One of the greatest procrastinators of literature, Shakespeare's Hamlet, also suggested a keen familiarity with the lines:

> "I do not know. Why yet I live to say 'this thing's to do.' Sith (since) I have cause, and will, and strength and means, to do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me."(Hamlet, 4.4. 43-46)

James Albery (1964) surmised that in "Epitaph written for Himself": "He slept beneath the moon, He basked beneath the sun; He lived a life of going-to-do, And died with nothing done" (cited in Wedeman, 1985, p. 1). Yet another observer of procrastination, the Victorian psychologist William James noted that, "Nothing is so fatiguing as the hanging on of an uncompleted task" (cited in Quarton, 1992, p. 4).

The infinitive verb procrastine is defined by *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (1998) as, "delay or postpone action," from the form pro, meaning, "forward and downward," and "crastinus of tomorrow from cras tomorrow." The nouns procrastination and procrastinator derive from these roots. The tendency to delay or procrastinate does not appear to be culturally limited. While the Spanish have "man~ana", Arabs have been known to say "burka fil mishmish", which roughly translated means "leave it for the soft spring weather when the apricots are blooming" (Demarest, 1974).

Although every culture acknowledges the tendency to delay and that virtually everyone puts off some action until a later time, few of those who engage in such behaviours would go so far as to define themselves as chronic procrastinators. Those who define themselves as chronic procrastinators must then somehow experience and perceive themselves as different, as plagued not only by their tendency to delay, but also from the negative consequence of their actions. The impact of these actions seem to weigh most heavily on their relationships at work, at home and in other important areas of their lives. Individuals who define themselves as chronic procrastinators may appear excited or proud when describing the ways in which they managed last-minute deadlines (Wedeman, 1985); however, it remains difficult to fully appreciate how they genuinely think and feel about such procrastinating behaviors.

Procrastination Research Overview

The majority of the research literature on procrastination has focused on this behaviour in academic settings. Ferrari et al. (1995) suggested that it is useful to separate procrastination prevalence rates that occur in academic matters from that in other areas. Not surprisingly, college students have been the first and most widely studied. Hill, Hill, Chabot, and Barrall (1976) conducted one of the earliest surveys attempting to determine rates of procrastination in college students. Approximately 50 % of the 500 students sampled listed themselves as procrastinating about half of the time or more on academic tasks. Briordy (1980) constructed one of the first psychometrically oriented questionnaires to measure academic procrastination in college students. This study found that 20% of the 257 students surveyed reported themselves as "problem procrastinators," indicating that their tendency to put things off interfered with both their grades and their enjoyment of life. Further research by Aitken (1982), Solomon and Rothblum (1984), McCown (1986), McCown, Johnson, and Petzel (1989), and McCown and Roberts (1994) substantiated Briordy's 20% figure by indicating that procrastination is a substantial, self-perceived problem for between 20-30% of college students.

In contrast, relatively few studies have examined the prevalence of procrastination in the general non-student population (Ferrari et al., 1995). McCown and Johnson (1989) surveyed 146 subjects in their validation of an instrument to measure procrastination and found that over 25% stated that procrastination was a "significant problem" in their lives. Almost 40% of subjects surveyed stated that procrastination had personally caused them financial loss during the last year. Ferrari (1992; 1993) also conducted several studies regarding procrastination with working adults and suggested that procrastination is a self-perceived problem for many. The magnitude of the perceived problem reflects an individual assessment of personal performance in relation to a personal standard.

In 1994, McCown and Roberts completed a telephone survey to investigate procrastination suggesting that procrastination scores for men reach a peak for persons in their middle-to-late 20's. Scores then decline until approximately age 60, when they rise abruptly. For women, scores decline from a high point in early adulthood and continue to decline until approximately age 60, at which they show a sharper rise than with men. The increase in scores for persons in their 60's were hypothesized to be related to retirement or to health limitations in this age group. The effects may also be due to cohort factors, such as the experience of specific age groups with the Great Depression or World War II. Ferrari et al. (1995) have suggested that age-related difficulties in procrastination remain an intriguing source of future research.

Harriott and Ferrari (1996) explored procrastination behavior among samples of a community, to provide insight into the profile of the adult population who experience procrastination. No assessment of ethnicity was made, and respondents were not randomly selected, as people who attend invited talks on procrastination are not likely to representative of the adult community. Nevertheless, the findings suggested that procrastination may be a fairly common phenomenon for about one in five adults.

Rationale for this Study

While a variety of studies have investigated the prevalence rate of procrastination in both academic and work settings, virtually no research has studied the process and experience of chronic procrastination in adults. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to extend beyond extant research by interviewing adults about the experience and the influence of chronic procrastination on their current level of functioning. Because individuals' level of awareness of their own procrastination forms a component of their experience with procrastination, no attempt was made by the researcher in the present study to guide participants toward enhanced self-awareness before data collection began.

Instead, participants were asked to discuss the experience and impact of chronic procrastination that were particularly salient to them in their daily functioning.

Daily functioning provides a starting point for discussing chronic procrastination in adults' lives in an individualized way. In other words, the participants themselves generated the structure of the discussion by talking about their own personal experiences, rather than being asked to discuss a given type, number, or variety of life activities. In this way, communication of their experiences with chronic procrastination was made to reflect as fully as possible the events and concerns which authentically characterize their lives. In contrast with traditional research on procrastination, this approach allowed the adults to emerge from the data as "full human beings", giving "voice" (Meloy, 1994) to all the goals, concerns, failures and triumphs that constitute their lives.

A detailed qualitative analysis of the adults' "voice" as they discuss their lives in which they chronically procrastinate may contribute a fresh perspective to the literature on procrastination. Most research to date has examined students' and adults' procrastination using quantitative methods. Thus, exploratory research on procrastination has been left to clinicians and to anecdotal evidence of the scientists involved in the search for procrastination's meaning (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984).

My purpose in conducting this research is twofold. Firstly, I am interested in expanding our theoretical understanding of chronic procrastination. Secondly, I wish to contribute new clinical understandings of procrastination that have the potential to enhance the way clinicians work with clients.

Contemporary Definition of Procrastination and Investigative Concerns

What is procrastination? Although everyone seems to "know" what it is, there is limited agreement on a universal definition (Ferrari et al., 1995; Burka & Yuen, 1983; Aitken, 1982; Briordy, 1980). Most simply, procrastination is the tendency to delay, avoid, or put off doing something (Burka & Yuen, 1983). This seems simple enough; however, people judge their behaviour by different standards. One person's procrastination may be another's "incubation time". Some individuals who call themselves procrastinators are in fact very productive (Wedeman, 1985). Other individuals whose performance is substandard at best may consider themselves to be quite effective and efficient (Goldner, 1984). Is procrastination a behavior, a feeling, or a perception? If it is a behavior, how can it be measured? Is avoiding something for two hours procrastination, or shall we wait for two days before defining it thus?

With procrastination, the dominant distinguishing characteristic seems to be that one designates oneself as a procrastinator. It may be less an objective personality trait than a self-perceived state. The procrastinator is aware of his or her avoidance and is distressed by it. Indeed, several authors (Quarton, 1992; Wedeman, 1985; Greco, 1984; Burka & Yuen, 1983) have observed that procrastinators are distinguished from non-procrastinators by their awareness of their dilatory behaviour and their pain associated with this behaviour. Conversely, there are many instances where an individual's decision not to act may be completely justified. A brief delay may indicate a need for planning time. Allowing time for thoughts to come together prior to behaving often prevents future difficulties. Procrastination viewed in this light may prove an enviable trait -

reducing impetuous action and "leap before looking " consequences. Self-identification as a procrastinator, then, is a defining characteristic used in this study.

Additionally, this study involves investigating procrastination of a different nature, namely chronic procrastination. It refers to something best described as a compulsion-like tendency to postpone action which is known to be desirable. To this definition I would add that this tendency to "postpone actions known to be desirable" involves consequences, including a sense of self-destructiveness for the procrastinating individuals. This style of procrastination that exists in the lives of many is something that has been widely recognized by experts in the professional literature as chronic procrastination (Ferrari et al., 1995; Quarton, 1992; Burka & Yuen, 1983; Green, 1981; Knaus, 1979; Ellis & Knaus, 1977).

Despite harmful consequences and lost productivity, many individuals prone to procrastinating continue to deny the losses sustained in personal, interpersonal and occupational areas. For example, as an individual clinically engaged in practice in mental health settings, I have witnessed the impact of procrastination. Psychologists and social workers, while joking about the reams of paperwork they have to complete, will suddenly and dramatically become anxiety-ridden when thrown into preparations for upcoming file reviews. Afterward, the procrastinator, somehow unable to learn from the experience, finds old habits quickly settle back, and the next audit, whether months or years later, likely proves just as frantic and nerve-wracking as the last. Consequently, a great many people lead their lives avoiding new risks, delaying actions while seeking flawless outcomes and watching the passing of deadlines. There are numerous others who reason that, "If I don't do the job, I can't fail this evaluation." Many, including myself, have lived and reasoned in these ways.

The roots of this study extend back into my early childhood memories, when painful awareness of performance dreads and inhibitions first occurred. They seemed to well up suddenly from somewhere deep within me, my thoughts growing into boogieman-like concerns, which I sought to avoid at all costs. Often amidst a sense of mounting panic, I learned to reduce these aversive experiences by turning toward other activities as temporary escapes. Now, I find myself weeping for the youth who feared his abilities, who avoided risking, who distrusted himself and who lived diminished as a result.

Statement of the Question

This study addressed the question: "What is the experience of chronic procrastination in adults?" The key terms of this inquiry were defined as:

1. Adults: Female or male individuals between the age of 19 and 65.
2. Experience: The verbal expressions of personal thoughts and feelings occurring in moments of awareness from the individual's point of view while contemplating their process of procrastinating.
3. Chronic: Prolonged, recurrent, ongoing; for a minimum of five years.
4. Procrastination: To put off taking action to a future time; to defer or postpone.

This choice of exploration springs as much from the heart as the head and represents both personal yearnings and professional aspirations - choices and turning points. This study searches for an understanding of the meaning and nature of reported inner experiences of individuals defined as chronically procrastinating adults.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Historical Definitions of Procrastination

Ferrari, Johnson, and McCown's (1995) text, *Procrastination and Task Avoidance: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, provides a fascinating and well-documented history of the term "Procrastination" which they suggest continues to conjure up contrasting images among poets. Among the poets fascinated by this topic was Edward Young who wrote in 1742, "Procrastination is the Thief of Time," where he was apparently condemning the waste of the most precious of human resources. When in 1927, Marquis wrote that "procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday," he regarded this human frailty with bemused tolerance. Both meanings are retained today - the former for moderate to severe forms of indecision and delay, and the latter for less consequential transgressions (cited in Ferrari et al., 1995, p. ix).

Milgram (1992) emphasized that procrastination is essentially a modern malady, noting that its occurrence is only relevant in countries where technology is advanced and adherence to schedules is important. There appears to be considerable truth to this assertion. The more industrialized a society, the more salient the construct of procrastination becomes. DeSimone (1993) noted that many pre-industrialized societies do not have words comparable to our notion of procrastination. The ancient Egyptians, for example, possessed two verbs that have been translated as meaning to procrastinate. One describes the useful habit of avoiding unnecessary work and impulsive effort while the other denotes the harmful habits of laziness in completing a task necessary for subsistence, such as tilling the fields at the appropriate time of the year in the Nile flood cycle.

While many researchers agree with Milgram (1992) that procrastination may be much more conspicuous in industrial societies, it is important to qualify the assertion that procrastination is a purely modern phenomena. Similar words or constructs have existed throughout history although with different and usually less negative connotations. The term procrastination comes directly from the Latin verb procrastinare, meaning quite literally to put off or postpone until another day (DeSimone, 1993). This itself is a compilation of two words - pro, a common adverb implying forward motion, and crastinus, meaning "belonging to tomorrow". The combined word is used numerous times in Latin texts, not surprisingly, given the military emphasis of Roman culture. Roman use of this term seemed to reflect the notion that deferred judgment may be necessary and wise, such as in situations when it was best to wait the enemy out and demonstrate patience in military conflict. Perhaps to the ancients, procrastination involved a sophisticated decision regarding when not to act, an opposite tendency from impulsiveness and / or acting without adequate forethought.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, 1952) lists the earliest known English usage of the word procrastination as occurring in 1548 in Edward Hall's Chronicle*: The Union of Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancestre and Yorke*. The OED notes that the term is used several times in this work and apparently without pejorative connotation, reflecting more of the concept of "informed delay" or "wisely chosen restraint" popular in Roman accounts. According to the OED, the word procrastination was in relatively common usage by the early 1600s. The negative connotations of the term did not seem to emerge until the mid-18th century at approximately the time of the Industrial Revolution (cited in Ferrari et al., 1995, p. 4).

"Sloth is equal in nefariousness to greed, lust, theft, and murder" (Henry Wykliffe, 1142; cited in Ferrari et al., 1995, p. 4). According to Ferrari et al. (1995), how procrastination came to acquire its negative moral connotations is speculative. They suggest that it is well known that agrarian societies' contempt is reserved for persons demonstrating sloth - a term connoting physical inactivity that etymologically and philosophically was initially separated from the concept of procrastination. According to the OED (1952) definition, sloth was an Old English term widely used in the Middle Ages. Sloth implies not only personal avoidance, but also active manipulation to get another to do the work necessary for one's own subsistence. This term was much more relevant to the lives of persons who lived in an agriculturally based society. In today's industrial society, the term has mostly vanished from contemporary use (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Milgram (1992) is undoubtedly correct when he asserts that the importance attached to punctuality is greater in industrialized countries. The distinction between sagacious delay and immoral laziness has seemed to blur in contemporary Western language and social thought where economic emphasis is on more immediate activity. Ferrari et al. (1995) also suggested that an interesting study for an industrial psychologist working in conjunction with a linguist and an economist would be to correlate linguistic changes in the concepts of task delay with indices of economic growth. They would predict that as economies become larger and more complex, the concept of sloth becomes less important, and words related to the concept of task avoidance become more prevalent and meaningful.

Introduction to the Literature on Procrastination

The review of 138 articles and 4 texts generated from several computer data base sources suggested that research on the topic of procrastination was virtually absent two decades ago. However, since that time published research has increased with most of the work focusing on undergraduate university level participant pools that address either "academic procrastination" or "neurotic indecision" (Ferrari et al., 1995; Milgram, Stroloff, & Rosenbaum, 1988). The focal limitations are further encumbered with the exclusive use of a narrow range of methodological procedures. Few followed qualitative designs.

Synopsis of Procrastination Research

Since in contemporary Western societies, a high value is placed on timely, efficient and productive work, those people who habitually avoid or delay important or necessary tasks are referred to by a number of disparaging terms; among them is the term "procrastinator" (Thibodeau, 1996; Ferrari, Johnson & McCown, 1995). Procrastination on academic tasks is a potentially serious problem. Although estimates of its incidence vary widely, up to 70% of university undergraduates report some degree of procrastination in their academic endeavours (Blunt & Pychyl, 1998; Ferrari et al., 1995; Aitken, 1982). Similarly, Pychyl's (1995) study of doctoral students revealed that procrastination was a key construct in the graduate students' descriptions of their personal projects. Thus, procrastination appears to be an important area of investigation for those researchers interested in understanding the complete student experience. Procrastination also appears to be related to Western cultural values of work and meeting deadlines (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Despite its apparent relevance to the lives of certain individuals, the subject of procrastination has received relatively little attention in the psychological research literature (Ferrari et al., 1995). One striking characteristic of the relatively small body of work that does exist is the lack of consensus among researchers regarding both the definition and the cause of this behaviour (e.g., Ferrari et al., 1995). In defining procrastination, most researchers agree that some form of needless delay in performing tasks is central. Beyond that basic premise, definitions vary. Silver (1974) for example, claims that procrastination consists of a cognitive error in estimating the ideal timing of task initiation. Other researchers argue that, at its core, procrastination is an irrational and self-defeating behaviour with a neurotic element (e.g., Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Silver & Sabini, 1981). In contrast, Ferrari (1993) points out that delaying a task may at times be very rational, when the delay eliminates the need to complete the task. Finally, some researchers try to avoid the confusion underlying these multiple definitions by restricting themselves to operationally defined procrastination, some using behavioural measures (e.g., Lay, 1987) and others relying on questionnaires (e.g., Aitken, 1982).

In a more comprehensive attempt to define this construct, Milgram (1991) has proposed a multifaceted definition of procrastination with four components: (1) delayed behaviour; (2) whose product is inferior; (3) involving a task seen as important by the procrastinator; and (4) causing distress. Although more complex, this definition is so broad that is has seldom been used in conducting experimental research on procrastination. The conspicuous lack of consensus regarding the definition of procrastination is often noted in the literature (e.g., Ferrari et al., 1995; Milgram, Sroloff & Rosenbaum, 1988).

Theoretical Overview of Procrastination Research

Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Theories

Psychoanalytic Theories

In many areas of psychology, psychoanalytic theories have formed some of the earliest comprehensive explanations of behavior (Brown, 1936; cited in Ferrari et. al, 1995). Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that procrastination is no exception. The concept of avoidance, particularly regarding specific tasks, was discussed by Freud and by a number of his followers. The Freudian notions of dynamic defenses and task avoidance postulate that tasks that are not completed are avoided primarily because they are threatening to the ego (Ferrari et. al, 1995).

The obvious problem with psychoanalytic theories of procrastination is that they are difficult to test empirically. However, some of the first experimental research regarding procrastination was conducted by theorists operating from a psychoanalytic perspective (Ferrari et. al, 1995).

Using the time period that it takes undergraduate students to fulfill their course requirements as an operational definition, Blatt and Quinlan (1967) studied a group of high and low procrastinators. The two groups were compared on a number of variables. No significant differences were found between groups on any of the following: college grade point averages, vocabulary or information subtest-scale scores of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Test (WAIS), areas of academic major, number of extracurricular activities, or total scores from the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). However, significant differences were found between groups in a measure relating to the perception of time. The procrastinating students had a lower score on the picture-arrangement subtest of the WAIS, suggesting to Blatt and Quinlan that they had a diminished ability to anticipate future events. Furthermore, when presented with projective test-like story stems, the procrastinating students told significantly more "present oriented" narratives than punctual students. The authors noted that the story stems of procrastinators produce more themes concerning death. They interpret all of these results from a psychoanalytic view, which argues that chronic lateness is related to an unconscious fear of death. They believed procrastination to be an unconscious attempt to stave off mortality by showing contempt for constraints of the clock and calendar (Ferrari et al., 1995). Ferrari et al. (1995) also suggest that psychoanalytic theories regarding procrastination remain popular (Anderson, 1987; Giovacchni, 1975; Jones, 1975; Widseth, 1987) despite the absence of substantial experimental support.

Psychodynamic Theories

Psychodynamic theorists emphasize the symbolic aspects of procrastination as it relates to previous childhood experiences, especially childhood traumas (van der Kolk, 1987; cited in Ferrai et al., 1995). Psychodynamic theorists may also stress the manner in which early childhood experiences shape the cognitive processes of adults (Ferrari et al., 1995).

In 1963, Missildine identified what he termed "a chronic procrastination syndrome". He believed that "slow, daydreaming paralysis" regarding task achievement is the final manifestation of this syndrome, and that this syndrome is caused by faulty childrearing practices.

MacIntyre (1964) also suggested that faulty child rearing can result in procrastinating adults. MacIntyre believed that either of two parental extremes can cause this problem. The parent who is too permissive is likely to produce a "nervous underachiever" who simply becomes too anxious to meet future self-imposed deadlines. The parent who is too stern, or authoritarian, is liable to produce an angry underachiever who touts his or her independence from parental figures by habitual disregard for the authority of the clock. Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that these two typologies bear resemblance to those empirically discovered by Lay (1987), McCown, Johnson, and Petzel (1989), and Ferrari and Olivette (1993, 1994).

Ferrari et al. (1995) also suggest that a popular psychodynamic interpretation of procrastination was presented by the popular writer Spock in 1971. Spock postulated that unconscious feelings of parental anger express themselves when children fail at parentally imposed tasks. Children may unconsciously respond to this anger by demonstrating a delay of future goal-oriented behavior. When adults raised under these conditions encounter a task requiring a significant degree of achievement, they unconsciously recall the parental conflict. They respond to this unconscious memory and subsequent resentment by attempting to thwart the wishes of the parental figure who is imposing the achievement-oriented task. The result is that they find themselves chronically unable to finish any task that is reminiscent of the early childhood conflicts between themselves and their parents. They become chronic procrastinators, with no insight into their behavior.

Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that the psychodynamic tradition also remains very popular in self-help books. Burka and Yuen's (1983) layperson's guide to procrastination highlights common fears of success and failure, as well as anger at authority as major contributors to procrastination.

In examining the utility of the psychodynamic perspective, similar problems are evident as in evaluating psychoanalytic theory. Despite methodological shortcomings, researchers have found some evidence for the relation between the general psychodynamic orientation of childhood trauma relating to procrastination. McCown, Carise, and Johnson (1991) found that adult children of alcoholics were more likely to report higher procrastination scores than other college students.

Research evidence also supports the role of authoritarian parenting in the development of procrastinators. Ferrari and Olivette (1994) asked 84 young women to identify their parents' authority styles. Procrastination scores among these women were significantly related to their father's authoritarian parenting style. Furthermore, these women reported high rates of suppressed anger, and described their mothers as indecisive. In other words, female procrastinators claimed to be raised by authoritarian fathers and indecisive mothers, and used procrastination as a passive-aggressive strategy to cope with this home environment. In psychodynamic terms, it would appear that procrastination may be a way to redirect suppressed anger at a dominating father into a socially acceptable behavior pattern (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that "psychodynamic thinking has become so commonplace in our culture that psychodynamic explanations appear to be commonplace explanations" (p. 25). Unfortunately, sufficient research is lacking to answer the question of the validity of the psychodynamic paradigm for procrastination research.

Reinforcement Theory

According to behavioral theory, students who procrastinate probably have a history of having been successful procrastinators, or at least of finding more reinforcing tasks than studying (Bijou, Morris, & Parsons, 1976). Classical learning theory has emphasized both punishments and rewards in the behavior of procrastinators. Consequently, procrastination should occur most frequently in students who have either been rewarded for such behavior or who have not been punished sufficiently for it (Ferrari et al., 1995). McCown and Ferrari (1995) tested this hypothesis directly. The authors asked a group of college-student academic procrastinators and non procrastinators, as assessed by Aitken's Procrastination Inventory (API), to recall how many times they had successfully "pulled off" a last-minute deadline. This involved completing a task with little time to spare. Participants also were asked to recall how many times they had failed to perform this last-minute activity successfully. As predicted by reinforcement theory, procrastinators could recall significantly more incidences of successful performance at last-minute deadlines and significantly fewer incidences of being punished by external agencies for not being punctual. Whether these results suggest differences in actual reinforcement history, or simply differences in self-perception or recall, is a question for further research (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Regarding the rewards of procrastination, McCown and Johnson (1991) indirectly tested reinforcement theory by examining what students do when they avoid studying. Not surprisingly, students engaged in a variety of activities that they found more reinforcing than studying. Extraverted students tended to associate with larger numbers of people, while introverted students tended to prefer more isolated settings. Regardless, students tended to perform activities that were seen as more enjoyable than studying, suggesting the utility of the reinforcement paradigm for deciphering causality of procrastination.

Solomon and Rothblum (1984) studied the role of punishment in academic procrastination of college students. When they factor analyzed the reasons given by students for individual incidences of procrastination, students reported procrastinating on tasks that they found unpleasant. Their conclusion is that many people simply do not complete tasks that are aversive, thus adding to the utility of a behavioral account of procrastination.

Another possible hypothesis, derived from learning theory, is that people are likely to procrastinate actions that have more distant consequences than those with immediate consequences (Ferrari et al., 1995). Further research into this area of inquiry is still needed.

Escape and Avoidance Conditioning

Procrastination is seen by some researchers as a means of avoiding or escaping responsibilities (Ferrari et al., 1995). Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that procrastination may be seen as either escape or avoidance behavior. It represents escape conditioning when a person begins to perform a task and then aborts it and the task remains incomplete (Honig, 1966; cited in Ferrari et al, 1995). Silver (1974) described a similar phenomenon as "maintaining the procrastinating field," in which a person engages in behaviors that are an incomplete and preliminary part of the entire task that needs to be accomplished. Procrastination may represent avoidance conditioning when the behavior in question is never undertaken and is completely avoided. This is especially true when an external stimulus serves as a stimulus for the avoidance (Ferrari et al., 1995).

What is the discriminative stimulus for procrastination? Authors such as Burka and Yuen (1983) and Solomon and Rothblum (1984), who work in the behavioral and cognitive-behavioral tradition, argue that a discriminative cue is anxiety. Students who have extreme anxiety are most likely to procrastinate because it is more reinforcing to avoid the anxiety associated with studying than it is to study (Ferrari et al., 1995).

McCown and Johnson (1989) expanded on this concept of anxiety and task avoidance by a repeated measure involving daily assessment of anxious students who were also procrastinators. Students were assessed twice a day for 14 days. Anxiety peaked early for these students and then dissipated. Studying follows a similar pattern. However, as the exam period nears, anxiety increases. Apparently, at a point near the exam period, anxiety rises abruptly so that students are no longer able to avoid it by postponement of studying. At this point comes the frantic last-minute studying that is the hallmark of many chronic academic procrastinators (cited in Ferrari et al, 1995).

Cognitive and Cognitive-Behavioural Theories

Irrational Beliefs

Ellis and Knaus (1977) likely popularized the first cognitive-behavioral explanation of procrastination. These authors stated that their clinical experiences related procrastination to irrational fears and self-criticism. Procrastinators, they argued, are frequently unsure of their ability to complete a task. Consequently, procrastinators delay starting the task in question.

At the heart of such irrational fear for procrastinators is an inappropriate concept of what constitutes an adequately accomplished task (Ferrari et al., 1995). Failure is inevitable; standards are simply too high. To circumvent the emotional consequence of this failure, procrastinators delay beginning a task until it cannot be completed satisfactorily. The payoff for the procrastinator is that his or her avoidant behavior furnishes a convenient excuse for the inevitable failure caused by this avoidance. A task done poorly by the procrastinator can be blamed on time limitation or even laziness, rather than inability. In this manner, procrastination serves as an ego-defensive function, not unlike that postulated in psychoanalytic theory (Wideseth, 1987). Furthermore, its occurrence is perpetuated because of this reason, despite the anxiety it seems to create in the frantic last-minute efforts of the procrastinator (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Solomon and Rothblum (1984) studied the frequency of academic procrastination in college students. They factor analyzed the results of a questionnaire designed to detect the reasons for student procrastination. Their main finding in this research was a general factor relating to fear of failure. Students avoided doing assignments that they perceived could not be completed adequately. Unfortunately, there was no attempt to ascertain to what degree the students' beliefs were actually correct, as compared to irrational beliefs. Bridges and Roig (1997) suggest that it may be that students avoided tasks that they had no ability to perform, in which case the avoidance behavior would have been highly rational indeed.

Ferrari, Parker, and Ware (1992) attempted to expand the study of academic procrastination and cognitive beliefs using the Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students (PASS) and several personality measures. Fear-of-failure scores were significantly related to general self-efficacy scores but not to academic locus of control. In a related study, Ferrari (1991) found that when given a chance to create projects they might work on, procrastinators chose easy tasks. Ferrari hypothesized that procrastinating behavior was protective in the sense the individual is shielded from self-knowledge regarding lack of ability or competence.

Self-Statements

Greco (1985) developed a self-statement inventory of cognition associated with procrastination. He reported data suggesting that procrastinators are more likely to engage in negative self-talk, especially regarding excuse making. This inventory was designed to be used both as an assessment tool and as a treatment strategy. Individuals in treatment begin by monitoring their self-statements regarding completion of specific tasks that have caused them difficulty in the past. Once the client becomes aware of the pattern of cognitions associated with procrastination, the general direction of these cognitions serves as an impetus for monitoring the undesirable behavioral correlates frequently found to follow these thoughts.

Research is not universal regarding the importance of cognitive self-statements. For example, Rothblum, Solomon, and Murakami (1986) noted that "…high procrastinators do not differ from low procrastinators in their study behavior or even on negative cognitions" (i.e., self-statements) "nearly as much as they differ on anxiety" (p. 394). Furthermore, as in much of the cognitive self-statement literature, it is impossible to determine whether negative self-statements are a cause or an effect of procrastination.

Locus of Control and Learned Helplessness

Taylor (1979) asserted that the cognitive variable of locus of control might provide fertile ground for future research on procrastination. To date, results with this variable have been mixed. Briordy (1980) found no relation between self-reported procrastination and three different locus of control scales. Ferrari et al. (1992) also reported no significant relationship between academic procrastination and academic locus of control. Aitken (1982) found a non-significant correlation between her procrastination measure and Rotter's Locus of Control Scale. However, Powers (1985) found that internal locus of control was higher in non-procrastinators. Although a relationship between procrastination and locus of control seems intuitively logical, the current set of data suggests a complex yet unclear relation at best. Trice and Milton (1987) further suggested that generalized locus of control may not be as useful in predicting academic procrastination as an academic-specific measure, such as the one constructed by the authors for their study.

Locus of control likely has a relation to causal attributions (explanations) regarding task success or failure (Ferrari et al., 1995). Learned helplessness, a construct related to locus of control, has remained one of the more popular topics in the cognitive-psychopathology literature. The so-called "reformulation" of the learned helplessness model (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978) has emphasized the stability of attributions regarding the environment and personal behavior.

Rothblum et al. (1986) found that high procrastinators were significantly more likely than low procrastinators to attribute success on examinations to external and unstable factors. Both procrastinators and non-procrastinators increased studying as a deadline loomed, but unlike the study of McCown and Johnson (1989), both groups reported less anxiety as the deadlines approached. High procrastinators, particularly women, were also significantly more likely than were low procrastinators to report more test anxiety, state anxiety, and anxiety-related physical symptoms.

Perfectionism

Clinicians often claim that perfectionism is a primary motive for procrastination (Burka & Yuen, 1983; Ellis & Knaus, 1977). Presumably, a person procrastinates in order to gain additional time to produce the best possible product (Ferrari, 1992). When personal standards regarding task completion are irrationally high, it is hypothesized that tasks are unlikely to be completed in a punctual manner (Ferrari et al., 1995). A recent study examining perfectionism and procrastination suggests complex positive and negative links that require further investigation (Stober, 1998).

Depression, Low Self-Esteem, and Anxiety

Depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety often occur together (L'Abate, 1994). At times it is difficult to draw distinctions between these syndromes, suggesting that a common factor may be responsible for all three (Eysenck, 1970; cited in Ferrari et al., 1995).

Surprisingly, little is known about the relationship of depression and procrastination (Ferrari et al., 1995). Clinicians frequently report that depressed people do not get things done promptly. Sometimes it is noted that specific failure to complete tasks may contribute to depression. A feeling of dejection following an inability to meet a deadline is a common experience. Several researchers have suggested that procrastination may be a risk factor for more serious depression, as well as anxiety and attention deficit disorder (Harriot, 1996; Hallowell & Ratey, 1994; Johnson, 1992).

Low self-esteem is characterized by many contemporary theorists as a product of an extensive history of failure to meet internally generated expectations (L'Abate, 1994). Intuitively, one might expect that people with low self-esteem would postpone completing tasks. On the other hand, people who do not complete tasks might very well develop low self-esteem, especially during periods of their lives when punctuality is highly reinforced, such as during school. Data does not allow for causal inference, but does support a moderate relationship between self-esteem and procrastination (Ferrari et al., 1995). Aitken (1982) found a correlation between "low self-concept" and academic procrastination scores. Similar correlational findings have been reported elsewhere (Ferrari et al., 1995; Ferrari, 1989, 1992) and appear to be consistent throughout studies of procrastination in the literature.

The relationship between anxiety and procrastination is more complex and controversial. The role of anxiety as a cue for task avoidance appears to have some support (Ferrari et al, 1995). A separate question involves whether or not procrastinators are more or less anxious than non-procrastinators. Aitken (1982) tested the hypothesis that procrastination is related to an elevated level of anxiety. She correlated academic procrastination scores from her inventory with a measure of anxiety. Procrastination scores correlated only slightly with this measure. Although significant, this correlation accounts for only about 5% of the total variance.

McCown, Rupert, and Petzel (1987) found a strong curvilinear relationship between neuroticism scores and academic procrastination. Students who were extremely habitual and timely were more likely to be higher on the neurotic score. Students who were extremely procrastinating were also likely to score high on neuroticism. These authors suggest that, depending upon other factors, neuroticism or autonomic activity can serve as either signals to get things done or as signals to avoid things.

Lay, Edwards, Parker, and Endler (1989) report a more linear relationship between anxiety and procrastination, with anxiety increasing among procrastinators during an examination period. Rothblum, Solomon, and Marakami (1986) report that test and trait anxiety is particularly problematic for female procrastinators and believe that anxiety reduction is key for reducing procrastination, especially in women. The relationship between anxiety and procrastination is probably complex and depends largely on measurement methodology. This may be because anxiety is a multidimensional mixture of both cognitive and physiological variables (Zuckerman, 1991).

Achievement Motivation

Low negative correlations have been found between various non-projective measures for achievement and chronic procrastination (Ferrari et al., 1995). Briordy (1980) noted that students who self-reported frequent procrastination showed less achievement motivation, as measured by self-statements. Sweeny, Butler, and Rosen (1979) discovered a negative correlation between self-reported procrastination and achievement motivation. Aitken (1982) reported a negative correlation between procrastination, as measured by her scale, and achievement motivations. In contrast, Taylor (1979) detected no significant differences in achievement motivation between procrastinators and punctual students. When McCown (1994) examined achievement motivation in college students, including a high-risk group with a history of abuse, he noted that procrastination seems to be somewhat fostered by the tendency to be engaged in intimate discussion, rather than engaging in academic pursuits.

Intelligence and Ability

More intelligent students probably have a greater capacity for successful "last minute" performance. However, the underlying assumption from behavioral and cognitive-behavioral research is that students who showed less ability are those most likely to procrastinate (Ferrari et al., 1995). In comparing procrastinators and non-procrastinators on intelligence measures, Ferrari (1991) found that they did not differ significantly on verbal or abstract-thinking abilities.

Investigators have found no significant differences between overall grade point average and procrastination (Blatt & Quinlan, 1967; Newman, Ball, Young, Smith, & Purtel, 1974). Several additional studies appear in the literature supporting the hypothesis that academic procrastination is unrelated to ability. Rosati (1975) operationally defined procrastination as the number of modules completed in a self-paced engineering class. No differences between procrastinating and non-procrastinating students on grade point average or mathematical ability were reported. Taylor (1979) constructed a self-report questionnaire to distinguish procrastinating from non-procrastinating students. No significant difference between the two groups in terms of grade point averages or WAIS scores was detected.

On the other hand, Morris, Surber, and Bijou (1978) ascertained that students who procrastinated in a personalized system of instruction (PSI) course tended to be better students than non-procrastinators. This fact might be because brighter students feel more comfortable putting off work until the last minute. Or, it also could be that the brighter students had more difficult academic "completion" from other courses and scarce resources of time. In this case the PSI simply was "triaged" until later.

Aitken (1982) concluded that academic procrastinators actually had slightly significantly higher math SAT scores than punctual students. This led her to advance the hypothesis, similar to that of Morris et al. (1978), that procrastination is more common in capable students who have learned that they possess the cognitive abilities to perform the bulk of their course work at the last minute and still do reasonably well in [illegible]l.

The largest study regarding academic procrastination and intelligen[illegible] conducted by McCown and Ferrari (1995) who examined archival data from [illegible]70s in a PSI-based high school. The data were interesting because they were obtaine[illegible] a "school without walls" where students could pursue a number of nontraditional [illegible]cts in addition to the requirement of completion of a certain number of PSI module[illegible] academic subject. Most students who did avoid doing PSI modules did so to par[illegible]e more fully in artistic or political endeavors. Additionally, because the school dre[illegible] largely upper-middle-class students, SAT scores were available from available fro[illegible] entire group. Despite the PSI nature of the curriculum, a standardized test drawn f[illegible] PSI questions was given at the end of the year.

Data analysis showed a positive correlation between SAT scores and a te[illegible]y to fall behind during the semester, as measured by days behind per unit. How[illegible] mathematics SAT scores correlated negatively with the tendency to put off [illegible]matics and science modules. Students who did poorly in math and science may procrastinate in these subjects in particular. In fact, maximum procrastination was found with students who scored well on the verbal SAT, less well on the non-verbal sections, and who procrastinated in mathematics and sciences courses. Taken together, it seems that in a PSI curriculum, high verbal ability is associated with procrastination of verbal curriculum, while low math ability is associated with procrastination of mathematics-based work.

In this study there was a very high correlation between the measure of falling behind and the final test grade. The uniqueness of this measure should be emphasized. It was not connected to final student evaluation or grade, and no feedback was given to the student. Consequently, there was no incentive to study for it. However, it might be stated that this measure was a legitimate sampling of what was actually retained from the curriculum. Students who did substantial last-minute cramming learned less and retained less, despite being able to complete PSI modules "satisfactorily" (cited in Ferrari et al., 1995).

Impulsivity and Extraversion

When Aitken (1982) found correlation between self-reported procrastination and impulsivity, she considered this partial support for the Ellis and Knaus (1977) findings that procrastination is related to an inability to delay gratification. However, she cautiously noted that this relationship might be surprisingly high. Her test measure showed a high correlation between subscales measuring achievement motivation and "lack of impulsivity". It is likely that the impulsivity detected for procrastinators is the same factor as the lack of achievement the test also measures in procrastinators (Ferrari et al., 1995).

McCown (1995) examined the relationship between impulsivity, venturesomeness, empathy, and procrastination in college students and adults. He finds significant correlations between procrastination and measures of impulsivity. He believes that the routinization of adult life, compared with the diverse entertainment opportunities in college, provides for greater relationship between procrastination and venturesomeness, and its lack of relation in adulthood.

Regarding extraversion, McCown, Petzel, and Rupert (1987) noted a significant and relatively high relation between academic procrastination and extraversion. Extraverts may have more distractions in completing tasks, if they are more social. Furthermore, extraverts are more likely to need a variety of social and nonsocial stimulations (Eysenck, 1967). Consequently, they are less likely to start and finish a task in one sitting.

Conscientiousness

Lay (1998) and Johnson and Bloom (1993) have examined procrastination from the perspective of the five-factor model of personality. This "Big Five" framework includes the major factors of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1989). Each factor is composed of several dimensions, or facets, and can be reliably measured through use of the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1989).

In Johnson and Bloom's (1993) study, college undergraduates completed the Aitken (1982) measure of procrastination and the NEO-PI-R. Multiple regression procedures yielded the factor of Conscientiousness as the major factor accounting for variance in procrastination scores. Neuroticism was also significantly related to scores, contrary to previous findings (McCown, Petzel, & Rupert, 1987). In this study, extraversion was not significantly related to procrastination scores. However, this later finding likely relates to the fact that the EPQ-R, used in the McCown et al. (1987) study, differs from the NEO-PI-R in measurement of Extraversion.

Thus, procrastinators appear to be largely characterized by a lack of Conscientiousness (Lay , 1998; Ferrari et al., 1995). Participants' scores were significantly related to each facet of this factor, suggesting that procrastinators may be lacking in self-discipline, dutifulness, and order. Further research is indicated to identify the exact nature of the relation between both Neuroticism and Extraversion, because the Johnson and Bloom (1993) study failed to replicate previous research on these two factors and procrastination. Although this lack of replication relates to the differences in the measurement of these variables, future research is necessary to further examine these differences (Lay, 1998).

Accurate Time Perception

Burka & Yuen (1983) suggested that procrastination is related to an inability to estimate time correctly. These authors relied upon their clinical experiences with treating this problem, rather than empirical findings.

As noted previously, procrastination tendencies have been associated with a "present-oriented" perspective (Blatt & Quinlan, 1967). Wessman (1973) found that some individuals are ineffective users of time and lack a sense of punctuality. Gorman and Wessman (1977) urged future researchers to investigate additional dimensions of time-oriented behaviors in procrastinators.

Aitken (1982) attempted to correlate scores on her academic procrastinations questionnaire with experimental measures of the passage of time. She administered her questionnaire to students, and tested them on several measures of time estimation. No significant correlations were found between the procrastination scores and the following: students' estimates of a period of 30-second intervals; intervals of 4 minutes; 20 minutes; and their estimates of how much time was left until the end of a class period. The only significant correlation was between the procrastination scores and students' estimates of how long they thought it would take them to do a required task (e.g., read a brief passage). Not surprisingly, procrastinators tended to underestimate time necessary to complete a task, while non-procrastinators tended to overestimate this period. This finding was replicated by Vodanovich and Seib (1997) and McCown (1986).

Neuropsychological and Biological Variables

Strub (1989) discussed a neurologic syndrome partially characterized by procrastination. This involves a constant tendency toward putting off major life tasks (such as buying food). Etiologically, this syndrome appears to be due to damage to the dominant frontal or prefrontal lobes. Johnson and McCown (1995) discussed this syndrome further, as it related to a variety of acquired neurobehavioral disorders. To date, however, almost nothing is known regarding the neuropsychology of procrastination. Theoretically, it is possible that less severe chronic procrastinators exhibit subtle neuropsychological deficits related to executive functioning, but currently this remains simply an interesting speculation (Kaplan, 1998).

Other notions of direct biological differences between procrastinators and non-procrastinators are merely speculative. However, neuroticism and impulsiveness /

psychoticism - variables that apparently differentiate procrastinators from non-procrastinators – have moderate to large genetic components (Kaplan, 1998; Zuckerman, 1991).

Although direct evidence is lacking, biology may play a role in the subtype of procrastination that a person displays. At least two subtypes of motives have been postulated in the procrastination literature (Ferrari, 1992; 1993). One type of procrastinator tended to be underaroused, hence missing appropriate cues for deadlines, whereas another type appeared to be overaroused, and hence avoided performing tasks because of anxiety (McCown & Johnson, 1989). Ferrari (1992) found that scores on Lay's (1986) General Procrastination scale loaded on thrill-seeking, sensation-seeking measures, whereas scores on McCown and Johnson's (1989) AIP loaded on avoiding cognitive information and low self-esteem. It seems, then, that some forms of procrastination are motivated by arousal-seeking, a variable with a moderate genetic component, namely sensation-seeking (Zuckerman, 1991, cited in Ferrari et al., 1995).

Qualitative Studies of Procrastination

Phenomenologically based research on procrastination has been conducted by two researchers. Quarton (1992) originally investigated the problem of adult chronic procrastination, operating within a humanistic paradigm. The purpose of this research was to discover the character of the procrastination experience with colleagues and acquaintances who described themselves as having long-term difficulties with procrastination. Quarton prepared the 10 research participants for interviews during a group meeting in which he emphasized their role in communicating their "personal thoughts and feelings occurring in present moments of awareness . . . while encountering or contemplating the process of procrastination" (1992, p. 11). Essentially, participants were instructed to monitor their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours associated with procrastination, and were subsequently interviewed to discuss their thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

Generalizations of the findings were expressed by Quarton in the form of six core themes: (1) characteristic time impressions, (2) aversive bodily arousals, (3) spatial constrictions and distancing, (4) anxiety-reducing motions, (5) image-protecting diversions and (6) expectational, intrapersonal and interpersonal tendencies (1992, p. 71). These six themes were present for each of the ten research participants, and are described as "constituting the total experiential grounds upon which ... the experience of chronic procrastination rests" (1992, p. 140).

Thibodeau's (1996) research examined student procrastination using a grounded theory approach. Ten undergraduate and graduate students at a mid-sized Canadian university volunteered to discuss their "problem" procrastination. Her qualitative analysis of interview transcripts identified seven major categories: (1) evaluation, (2) project aversiveness, (3) concentration, (4) avoidance, (5) organization, (6) internal state, and (7) anxiety, which were presented as a tentative model of procrastination.

Self-Improvement Literature

There is a body of "self-improvement" literature which advises people on how to overcome procrastination. Bernard (1991) presents a magnetic theory of procrastination. This theory is based on nine major factors that push or repel you away from hard tasks and one key factor that pulls or draws one away from the work that one needs to do. Various addictions, fantasies, and self-lies that produce procrastination are also discussed in considerable detail. This work provides insight into the psychology of procrastination, as well as twenty-five specific self-help techniques to overcome it.

Burka and Yuen (1983) examines "the reasons why we put things off", fears of failure, success, control, separation, and attachment, and looks at the sources of these fears in our family, school, and work experiences. The authors also offer practical advice on how to manage procrastination and provide techniques on time management, self-assessment, goal setting and achievement, enlisting support from others, and handling the stress that often accompanies procrastination.

Knaus (1998) and Ellis and Knaus (1977) examine psychological factors that can produce the behaviour known as procrastination. The authors illustrate how self-doubting, anxiety, guilt, shame, or depression may lead to avoidance of tasks and responsibilities. These books also examine many of the irrational beliefs that may contribute to procrastination. A variety of cognitive, emotive, and behavioural techniques are presented to overcome problems and increase work productivity at home and at the office.

Procrastination Treatment and Intervention

In discussing procrastination occurring specifically in adults and nonstudents, Haycock (1998) and Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that we have even less outcome data than the unsatisfactory amount available for the treatment of college-student procrastination. One problem noted in the research literature with respect to the treatment of adult procrastination is determining which set of theories is the most pertinent to apply (Ferrari et al., 1995). With the student procrastinator, theoretical options appear generally limited to interventions relevant to the domains of behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, and social-learning therapies (Haycock, 1998). With adult procrastinators, choices need to be much broader.

Treatment of Typical and Atypical Adult Procrastination

Ferrari et al. (1995) defined typical procrastination as procrastination that fits into the patterns of neurotic avoidance (overarousal) and / or lack of conscientiousness (underarousal). According to these authors, it is also possible for persons to fit into both patterns at the same time. Several researchers believe that this combination accounts for the majority of clients seen in student-counseling centers (Haycock, 1998; Ferrari et al., 1995; Havel, 1993; Lamwers & Jazwinski, 1989). When clear patterns of either or both of these behavioral syndromes emerge, cognitive-behavioral and behavioral interventions are suggested as the treatment of choice, perhaps as few as 10 sessions, and almost always in under 25 hours of psychotherapy. Ferrari et al. (1995) stated that this does not mean that all instances of procrastination can be "cured" in 25 or fewer sessions. Instead, they suggested that there "seems little value in extending treatment with this particular modality if the client's symptoms have not shown some improvement" (p. 213).

As in the case of student procrastinators, treatment for adult and nonstudents should incorporate suitable interventions for the target symptoms of anxiety and / or lack of conscientiousness. Anxious task avoiders need to receive treatment to reduce their anxiety, whereas impulsive persons should receive treatment to modify the patterns of their own particularly dysfunctional behaviors. Fortunately, there is an abundance of outstanding literature available on the behavioral and cognitive-behavioral treatment of anxiety (McLean & Woody, 2000). The clinician who treats adult procrastinators should have familiarity and mastery of the basic techniques appropriate for the behavioral and cognitive-behavioral treatment of anxiety disorders, methods which are often incorporated into the treatment of procrastination. The clinician who treats the anxious adult procrastinator should be comfortable performing systematic desensitization, flooding, cognitive-behavior modification, successive approximation, and other commonly applied operant techniques. All of these interventions are designed to reduce the overarousing anxiety that is common with a specific subtype of procrastinators, and each of these techniques has been used successfully on many occasions with both college students and adults (Haycock, 1998; Ferrari et al., 1996; Ferrari et al., 1995).

However, according to Ferrari et al. (1995) lack of conscientiousness appears to be a much more common route toward procrastination with adult populations. One reason that they suggest for this may be that the college environment has more immediately punitive consequences for task failure, encouraging anxious procrastinators to be overrepresented in the college-age group. In addition, the anxiety associated with task avoidance extinguishes itself by the time persons move from college age into young adulthood. In any case, "disconscientiousness," seems to categorize many more adults who seek treatment for chronic procrastination (Ferrari et al. 1995). Behaviors related to disconscientiousness include impulsiveness, antiauthoritarianism, and, cortical underarousal, apparently one involving a neural system independent of the limbic overarousal observed in anxious procrastinators. They further hypothesize that such persons are not able to delay gratification (Ferrari & Emmons, 1994), so that beginning a task at a time closer to its deadline reduces the time spent without reward. Furthermore, such persons frequently are not sufficiently aroused by cues in their environment, so they do not begin a task at the optimal time to guarantee the maximal possibility of completion (Ferrari et al. 1995).

Unfortunately, conscientiousness and its behavioral antithesis characterized by the lack of this trait, has only recently emerged as a factor of serious personality research (Lay, 1998; Costa & McCrae, 1989; Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991). There are no controlled studies at this time that demonstrate empirically valid methods of increasing this trait. Consequently, the treatment goals for this group of clients are less theoretically based than with anxiety-related procrastination. In the absence of empirical literature, clinical interventions are based substantially on field observations of practitioners.

A clinical formulation stressing the causes of chronic "typical" procrastination is important in treating adult clients. The therapist can use information regarding the client's conscientiousness and anxiety in order to establish a successful treatment plan. Similar to the treatment of students who are extremely unconscientious, Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest a general strategy when working with adults who demonstrate this type of procrastination. The multifocal treatment approach involves some of the following components: (1) increasing environmental cues regarding upcoming deadlines; (2) decreasing cognitions that foster impulsiveness and underestimation of task demands; and (3) increasing self-rewards associated with completing tasks. The strategy is to increase awareness of aspects of the task that demand attention, primarily through cognitive-behavioral means, or by instructing the client in methods of self-reward and behavioral management.

Group Treatment

Within group therapy, Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that treatment of "typical" adult procrastinators is no different then that for college students. However, they suggest that overall we have been ineffective in treating adult procrastinators in a group-therapy format. The attrition rates of clients are too high, and unlike students, who are usually very motivated to overcome their procrastination due to poor grades, adult clients are very likely to simply skip important group sessions. Obviously, poor client attendance makes it impossible to conduct meaningful group work.

With this in mind, Ferrari et al. (1995) advocate that treatment of adult "typical" procrastination proceed primarily within the context of individual therapy. In this type of modality, missed sessions are not as critical, since they can be rescheduled, and the special attention afforded to individuals in one-to-one therapy often seems helpful in maintaining clients' motivations. Ferrari et al. (1995) note exceptions for family treatment of procrastination and group treatment for academic and dissertation procrastination.

Length of Treatment for Typical Adult Procrastination

"How long will therapy for adult procrastinators take?" There are no controlled studies of short-versus long-term procrastination treatment at this time (Tice & Baumeister, 1998; Ferrari et al., 1995). Ferrari et al. (1995) suggests that the length of time procrastinators must remain in treatment before they obtain substantial symptom remission depends on a several factors. These include the client's motivation, other personal issues and life stressors, social supports, and concurrent psychopathology which might be present. However, as stated earlier, most cases of "typical" procrastination treatment that are uncomplicated by any other mental health or psychiatric concerns can be substantially improved in between 12 and 25 sessions of individual cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy, with possibility of benefit diminishing rapidly after 25 sessions. Because of the apparent high rate of relapse, it is also recommended that several booster sessions be scheduled. For adult procrastinators, whose mean ages are usually higher than those of students, there may be a much longer history of procrastination. The behavior is more ingrained and, therefore, the behavior may require longer treatment to cause substantial modification. However, controlled studies are needed to determine the optimal frequency of these sessions.

Treatment of Typical Procrastination and General Psychotherapy

Several authors suggest that procrastination is a relevant problem only after the client has been in treatment for some time and a number of other therapeutic issues are presented (Haycock, 1998; Ferrari et al. 1995; Havel, 1993; White, 1988). Frequently psychotherapy will continue after the problem of procrastination is resolved, with a list of other difficulties being uncovered and deemed worthy of attention by both the therapist and the client.

Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that the attention to other therapeutic needs is appropriate, ethical, and good clinical practice as long as the client's initial gains regarding procrastination are not allowed to fade. Therapists who practice a psychodynamic framework frequently shift modalities into a more insight-oriented treatment after initial problems regarding procrastination are solved. When such therapists engage in this type of shift following a successful treatment for procrastination, they must be prepared to "work behaviorally" again when the need arises regarding the client's tendency to procrastinate (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Several authors also suggest that the psychodynamic approaches to treatment of "typical" procrastination are usually not warranted (Haycock, 1998; Knaus, 1998; Ferrari et al. 1995; Havel, 1993; White, 1988). A better theoretical rationale for treatment originates with cognitive-behavioral and behavioral approaches.

Ferrari et al., (1995) also believe that when treatment is deemed appropriate and timely by the therapist, procrastination should be the major focus of treatment. Too often, clients' treatment interventions are nebulous, and too all encompassing. For the procrastinator, treatment does not seem to work unless it is specific and highly focused.

Psychopharmacology and Procrastination

A characteristic of typical procrastination involves anxiety that interferes with the capacity to complete tasks in an orderly and timely fashion (Kaplan 1998; Haycock, 1998; Ferrari et al. 1995; Havel, 1993; Han, 1993). Thus, if a substantial portion of procrastination is due to anxiety, wouldn't use of medication undercut the anxiety sufficiently so that "talk" therapies would no longer be necessary?

Although this approach sounds as if it might produce an effective treatment approach, it has not been adequately demonstrated that procrastination is helped by medication. In fact, it has been suggested that medications in some cases can make the client worse, by decreasing anxiety and fostering an "I couldn't care less" attitude (Ferrari et al., 1995). There are, however, a few exceptions. Persons who are avoidant and in a chronic state of emotional arousal may benefit from acute-anxiety reduction medication. Ferrari et al. (1995) also suggest that medications rarely have a helpful impact on decision-related avoidance. Medications may help persons with discrete task-avoidance behaviors, such as fears of confronting inappropriate social behaviors of others.

Pharmaceutical interventions seem to do little for persons who "just don't get around" to paying their taxes or getting their license plates renewed.

Ferrari et al. (1995) also hypothesized that certain medications may in some circumstances be associated with an increase in procrastination by controlling too much anxiety, including the amount necessary to signal an upcoming deadline that requires action. In addition, a lack of conscientiousness and inadequate impulse control may also be associated with potential for abuse of prescription drugs. New and experimental drugs may hold some promise for treating avoidant procrastination, although much research is needed to determine effectiveness in this domain.

Another question concerns the use of medication for depression and whether pharmacological treatment of depression eliminates or affects procrastination. This question is especially relevant when the procrastinating behavior seems to be related primarily to an onset of depressive symptoms (Ferrari et al., 1995). Treatment of depression almost always takes precedence over the treatment of procrastination. Procrastination may be life threatening when people have a serious undiagnosed or diagnosed medical disorder for which they postpone treatment. One reason several authors advocate adequate psychological testing of persons entering treatment with a symptom of "procrastination" is that many of these people may be depressed and could benefit from medication and specific cognitive-behavioral techniques (Ferrari et al. 1995; Havel, 1993). However, there is no evidence that procrastination without the absence of depressive symptoms is enhanced by use of antidepressants. Ferrari et al. (1995) also suggest that limited experience with the newer antidepressants or even with the classic monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors exists to note whether they are of value in treating procrastination. MAO inhibitors have a profile suggesting potential use with individuals who are low in conscientiousness, in as much as they may reduce impulsive behaviors occasionally accompanying depression (Leonard & Spencer, 1990). More data generated from well-controlled studies is needed.

Psychological Assessment

Ferrari et al. (1995) discussed the necessity for a careful psychological assessment when treating adult procrastination. As was the case with students who seek treatment for this behavior, psychological testing with objective measures may be needed before treatment for procrastination begins. In fact, Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that procrastination in the nonstudent adult is even more worthy of the effort involved in psychological assessment because it is potentially more problematic and of greater concern that it is with students. If this behavior suddenly occurs without any substantial previous history, the clinician should be concerned about other, more serious psychiatric or physical diagnoses causing the procrastinating behavior. Procrastination is a relatively stable trait and its sudden emergence in the otherwise well-functioning adult suggests the potential existence of other, perhaps more serious disorders, including physical disorders.

If the trait has been long-standing and somewhat stable, then the procrastinator apparently has been coping with it by him- or herself relatively successfully for quite some time. Inevitably, he or she had learned a number of dysfunctional behaviors to compensate for this lack of punctuality, and treatment may be much more difficult than if it were begun with a young person. For example, a procrastinator may have learned how to manage life relatively well by avoiding responsibility for lateness by shifting the blame on others. He or she may also be adept at feigning or actually becoming ill when deadlines approach. The number of dysfunctional coping strategies employed by procrastinators is seemingly endless, and the longer the behavior has been present, the more the likelihood that these behaviors will themselves complicate treatment. It is likely that the client will have reached a tenuous coexistence with his or her work, family, and friends regarding punctuality.

Additionally, a sudden change in the ability to complete tasks in a punctual manner may be related to organic factors or psychiatric syndromes. This is especially possible regarding syndromes that present with a rapid manifestation of symptoms, such as acute depression or mania. Occasionally, persons with dementia will present to a mental health professional complaining of an inability to make decisions, or a tendency to put off actions that they once found easy to perform (Johnson & McCown, 1995). The practitioner who treats these "organic" problems as "psychological" risks a serious and potentially disastrous misdiagnosis that may very well be fatal. Therefore, Ferrari et al. 1995) argue that great care needs to be taken when assessing procrastination, especially in adults. When diagnosis is in doubt, such as in the case of a client with an uncertain history or of one who is not sufficiently articulate, the practitioner should seek a referral to rule out organic factors with a physician.

Rapid onset of procrastination may also be related to a more serious psychopathology (Ferrari et al., 1995). Probably the most important question in assessing procrastination is to determine its history and longevity. A sudden inability to get tasks completed in a punctual manner without any previous history of such problems in adult nonstudents is generally of more concern. Clinicians treating procrastination need to be prepared to employ traditional psychological testing whenever they think necessary to rule out more serious psychiatric problems (Ferrari et al, 1995).

Stress and Procrastination

Ferrari et al. (1995) also suggested that a potential cause of procrastination in persons without a previous history of this behavior may be a rapid change in life-stress levels. Stress may play a causal role in procrastination. People who are under atypical stress levels may tend to put things off, and if they have never encountered substantial personal stresses before, this behavior may appear quite novel and distressing. One effective treatment for this type of procrastination, obviously, is to reduce the level of life stressors as much as possible.

Reduction in life stressors may also, and somewhat paradoxically, cause a tendency toward task incompletion. Ferrari et al. (1995) note that some persons seem only to be able perform punctually when experiencing high levels of stress. When this stress is reduced to what most of us would consider a more humane level, these persons find themselves unmotivated and cannot meet deadlines in a punctual manner.

Addiction, Procrastination and Substance Abuse

Some people seem to need the satisfaction of completing a task at the last minute in order to become sufficiently motivated. Many of these persons will report a "high" or "rush" following task completion at the last minute (Ferrari, 1992). Ferrari et al. (1995) suspect that what is occurring is an increased norepinephrine turnover associated with exhaustion and lack of sleep, perhaps with some release of endogenous opiates. Somewhat similar phenomena have been studied in animals quite intensely (Maier, 1986) and are labeled "stress-induced analgesia". Researchers have also applied the concept of stress-induced analgesia to humans (McCown, Galina, Johnson, DeSimone, & Posa, 1993) and are exploring the manner in which people manipulate their environments to cause or heighten a stressor that for whatever reason is experienced as pleasurable.

Others may prefer a more cognitive interpretation of the above phenomena involving the boosted or exaggerated sense of self-efficacy that comes from "beating it down to the wire." When a person is able to do something at the last minute that his or her peers usually require much longer to accomplish, the procrastinator often (in attribution terms) would augment his or her self-esteem (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Regardless of whether causation is "physiological" or "psychological," in some cases persons actually seem to become addicted to the cycle of procrastination: frantic last-minute efforts, late task completion, and post-completion relief. The use of alcohol or other drugs further complicates the situation. Students and professionals will frequently postpone complex and difficult activities until the last minute and then, after frantic efforts involving extraordinary sleep deprivation and much personal stress, they will complete the task – but just barely. Following task completion, an intense period of "partying" involving disinhibitory behavior (e.g., drinking and sexual activities) may occur that would not occur in other circumstances. This reinforces the pattern of procrastination making it harder to treat successfully. The added bravado that occurs in people who believe that they are "smart enough to beat it to the wire" complicates any attempt to break these unproductive habits (Ferrari et al., 1995).

As a result, many procrastinators develop concomitant substance-abuse problems. Chronic substance abuse further increases procrastination as part of a vicious cycle. In this situation, both procrastination and substance-abuse problems need treatment, a fact often overlooked by addiction counselors and substance-abuse specialists (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Atypical Procrastination

Atypical procrastination is defined as brief, episodic procrastination occurring in a person who has previously not had a history of this behavior when other potential causes for task delays (e.g., psychopathology) have been ruled out (Ferrari et al., 1995). An example is dissertation procrastination. In atypical procrastination one or two factors are almost always present. Usually a monumental task has been imposed on a person without appropriate guidelines or mechanisms for feedback to determine whether the behavioral steps are correct. Hence the procrastinator engages in the behavior first discussed by Silver and Sabini (1981) namely, he or she "maintains the procrastinating field" and perseverates on portions of the tasks that he or she feels it is possible to perform satisfactorily. For example, in dissertation procrastination, the student may perform enormous and inappropriately large literature reviews, simply because this is something the student knows he or she can do well and probably has had several rewarded experiences performing. Or, the student may construct such a detailed outline that the actual writing of the dissertation never occurs.

Second, the task usually has some prominent meaning in the person's life. Like a dissertation, it may be a rite of passage, whereby the student leaves the safe world of academia for the hostile world outside of the university. Although we are reticent to invoke the notion of a dynamic, unconscious thwarting of task completion for a major rite of passage, it seems very often that many persons when faced with a defining challenge are unconsciously unable to complete the necessary task. Many psychoanalytic clinicians might wish to evoke unresolved childhood traumas as explanatory concepts, and despite the fact that these hypotheses are probably impossible to support with data, they often seem to fit the clients' clinical presentation (Sommers, 1992).

Dissertation procrastination, unlike other forms of procrastination, is actually more common among conscientious students (Ferrari et al., 1995). The task avoidance experienced by dissertation procrastinators is usually very upsetting for the persons involved because they do not have the substantial experience with uncompleted tasks that the typical procrastinator has. The usual personality style is one of conscientiousness, perhaps excessively so. Not being able to complete a task is very alarming and implies a loss of control. It is precisely for this reason that this behavior is so distressing to the procrastinator. A surprising number of previously high-functioning graduate students actually seek mental health intervention regarding their dissertation procrastination (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Green (1981) has shown that dissertation procrastination can be treated in a group setting. Ferrari et al. (1995) suggested an approach for coping with this type of procrastination that involves both cognitive-behavioral and psychodynamic intervention. Cognitive interventions are used to challenge the perfectionistic tendencies of these individuals. Psychodynamic interpretations are offered for the symbolic meaning of completion of the task at hand and perhaps the fear of succeeding independently. These "clinical hypotheses" are presented gingerly and offered as tentative formulations. If the student does not endorse them, therapists are directed to not force the issue. Some students seem particularly enamored with psychodynamnic explanations. Others, especially in the harder sciences, do not seem to be so attracted, and such interpretations may simply distract the student from the task at hand. Clinical judgment is needed to determine the client's level of resistance toward interpretations. The stance in psychoanalytic circles of waiting for the client to voice and then to accept an insight regarding the symbolic aspects of his or her procrastination is not supported. Nor should students who are experiencing dissertation procrastination be persuaded to enter time-consuming and emotionally draining self-explorational therapies until the dissertation is completed (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Psychodynamic Treatment for Atypical Procrastination

Ferrari et al. (1995) suggested that some clinicians have found psychoanalytic theory to be among the useful frameworks for treating procrastination. An example of the psychoanalytic framework applied to the apparently successful treatment of a chronic dissertation procrastinator was published in a case by Arlow (1989).

When procrastination occurs suddenly and in very delimited areas in a person's life, Ferrari et al. (1995) find utility in framing clinical hypotheses in a psychodynamic fashion. They find it a useful framework to hypothesize that "some unknown and unconscious aspect regarding the event's completion is distressing and consequently, the person strives, always unconsciously, to avoid task completion" (p. 229). Therefore, in treating atypical procrastination it is often useful to establish the meaning of what an event symbolizes for an individual.

In psychodynamic therapy for procrastination, the intent is to identify the hidden meaning of achievement-related events for the procrastinator. Invariably, an achievement-related event conflicts with a fear of achievement, often with the fear of achievement only coming out during brief psychotherapy. Clinical impressions seem to suggest that conflict often involves an authoritarian parent figure who usually has ambivalence regarding the adult child's achievement (Ferrari & Olivette, 1993, 1994), although this observation needs legitimate research. The technique is a general, explorative, time-limited model advocated by Strupp and Binder (1984).

Sometimes procrastination is limited not simply to specific tasks, but instead to tasks assigned by specific persons (Ferrari et al., 1995). For example, a person may have no problem completing a task until it is assigned by someone who reminds the procrastinator of a significant person in his or her past. A common example of this occurs regarding adult children or alcoholics. Although few characteristics have been uniquely identified with this group, previous research (McCown, Carise & Johnson, 1991) has established that elevated procrastination is common. This is not surprising. It is easy to imagine an environment where the child is punished for completing any activity, regardless of how conscientiousness his or her performance was. Often, such adult children appear to become hypersensitive to rejection from authoritative figures and hence demonstrate avoidance regarding task completion (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Unfortunately, there are few guidelines to determine when a more psychodynamic treatment for procrastination is appropriate, compared to a more traditional or cognitive-behavioral treatment (Ferrari et al., 1995). Several authors suggest that if there is a history of procrastination, cognitive-behavioral interventions are the most appropriate. If the behavior is discrete and involves a specific event or person, a more psychodynamic framework may be necessary to explore the meaning that the event has for the person and its associations with prior significant events or people (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Family Treatment

Family treatment may be indicated if there is more than one person in the family who procrastinates, or if the procrastination seems to be maintained by reinforcers occurring in family interaction. For example, it is not atypical to find a bright child encouraged to delay completing his homework by one of his or her siblings who are jealous of superior ability or attention bestowed on the academically more talented youth. Parents often confuse the situation even more by punishing the child who suggests task avoidance, thus inflaming an already volatile situation (McCown & Johnson, 1993). Family therapy can teach appropriate strategies to reduce the level of sibling competition and sabotage.

Family therapy may be helpful when one or more parent has a problem with completing tasks on time, and the parent or parents' behaviors affect other family members (L'Abate & Bagarozzi, 1993). Brief, problem-oriented interventions, such as those advocated by McCown and Johnson (1993) may be effective in convincing the procrastinating parent that his or her behavior is deleterious to the family. When the parent refuses or is incapable of behavioral change, family therapy can be invaluable in shifting the responsibility to other persons in the family system who may be more responsible.

Perhaps the best indication for family therapy is when one or more family members consistently procrastinate with respect to necessary or preventative medical treatment (Ferrari et al., 1995). Sometimes such persons will have a history of anxiety or depression. More frequently, they may also have a concurrent personality disorder. Regardless, they avoid physicians and other medical personnel, much to the dismay of their families and friends, to say nothing of the healthcare professionals they peripherally encounter (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Brief family therapy is often helpful in getting these persons to take more responsibility for their own bodies and their health-related behaviors. The approach by Johnson and McCown (1993) involves empowering families to take responsibility for their own behaviors. This model has been applied directly to medical patients with very good results. Often, one or two family meetings with ill family members may be sufficient to convince them that their family cares about their well-being and that their medical procrastination is hurting more people who care about them. When family dynamics become more complicated, or if the family has a history of longer-term family dysfunction, referral to a practitioner with expertise in family treatment is probably warranted.

Treatment and Intervention Summary

Adult procrastination is often substantially different from that encountered in college students, requiring different treatment strategies and longer interventions. The clinician must be able to use a number of therapeutic modalities, including behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, and psychodynamic methods to successfully intervene. Psychological testing can be helpful, and occasionally physical problems must be ruled out before therapy begins.

Brief, episodic task-delay and avoidance tendencies, labeled atypical procrastination, may require a different therapeutic emphasis than reoccurring, "lifelong" procrastination, called typical procrastination. Individual, group, and family therapy, as well as assessing other dysfunctional life patterns (e.g., drug abuse), also should be considered.

Well-designed and carefully conducted treatment studies need to be performed to compare the effectiveness of different procrastination treatment techniques. Through reliable outcome data effective techniques can be developed to treat both lifelong and short-term procrastination tendencies.

Summary

Procrastination is an important and growing area of psychological inquiry. Most of the research to date has been quantitative and is marked by disagreement regarding the definition and causes of procrastination. One reason for this disagreement may be the lack of a phenomenological base for the scientific research. As noted, few scholarly attempts have been made to discover the phenomenological character of procrastination; to define it from the perspective of those who experience it. This study attempts to address this deficiency by providing an examination of chronic procrastination derived from the experiences of adult participants. By focusing on the self-described experiences of adults who are troubled by chronic procrastination, the present study strives to provide an alternative framework within which procrastination may be further studied.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology and Research Design

Conceptual Framework and Model of Research

This section addresses the conceptual framework and model of research used to explore the question, "How do adults experience chronic procrastination?" It begins by noting introductory considerations of humanistic and qualitative paradigms. The central characteristics of heuristic research and methods are reviewed, along with their applications to the present study.

Humanistic Psychology Paradigm

A paradigm can be defined as a model that "expresses the collection and arrangement of beliefs, values and techniques by which an activity is pursued" (Gelwick, 1977, p. 55). Humanistic psychology itself is recognized as a relatively new paradigm "developed partially in opposition to what existed and partially to fill a void" (Synder, 1988, p. 30). The name was chosen in 1962 by a group of psychologists joined in common views and values who shared dissatisfaction with the psychoanalytic and behaviorist models of that time.

In the Association of Humanistic Psychology brochure, Buhler and Allen (1972) and Bugental (1967) codified the newly emerging perspectives by publishing a set of distinctions contrasting this orientation against the two others previously mentioned. Of note was prioritization of the individual's experience. By focusing on the individual's experience of existence as the central event in human understanding, this position designated theoretical explanations and behavioral constructs to secondary statuses. By emphasizing such uniquely human attributes as creativity, choice and self-realization, the humanistic psychology paradigm clearly departed from the stasis of other research models by a focused orientation on change of potential that characterizes all individuals.

This new paradigm is differentiated from the other theoretical models that stress "mechanical aspects of human functioning with physical sciences as a model" (Buhler & Allen, 1972, p. 15). Viewed from the humanistic perspective, science itself emerged as being valued, "not a mechanism, but a human process, and not a set of findings, but the search for them" (Bronowski, 1978, p. 63). Maslow (1954, p. 29) perhaps put this growing belief most succinctly, noting science came into being as a "human creation, rather than an autonomous, non-human or per se thing with intrinsic rules of its own." Humanistically-oriented scientists, as a group, viewed natural science ideals such as objectivity and detached knowledge as posing destructive influences when exercised in human science research, potentially falsifying results and outlooks (Polanyi, 1964). They expressed a common concern that by viewing the mind as a mechanism demanding a detached comprehension free of personal connection, natural science models were sacrificing meaning, range and significance for the sake of conforming with the governing assumptions of the traditional scientific method. Rallying around the belief that "good" science need not prove synonymous with "quantitative measurement, experimental design and multivariate, parametric statistical analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 19), these more humanistically-oriented psychologists emphasized the presence and importance of distinctly subjective processes.

Carl Rogers noted:

> "All science is based on recognition of a dimly sensed gestalt, a hidden reality. This gestalt or pattern appears to give reality to disconnected phenomena. The more that this total apprehension is free from cultural values and past scientific

> values, the better. The more it is based on all sensory awareness, upon unconscious directions and cognitive insights, the more adequate it is likely to be" (Rogers, 1968, p. 64-65).

Rogers recognized the necessity of perceiving the reality of the phenomenon under study in its own terms, regardless of its availability to empirical scrutiny. Rogers described rational thought as often blocked and full of fixed constructs and rigidly held preconceptions. What may seem absurd in rational thought may feel right to subjective inner knowledge. He urged scientists to follow their gut feelings, which often led to creative discovery and new knowledge (Rogers, 1968).

Michael Polanyi was also influential in recognizing the place and importance of subjective experience in scientific endeavors. He advanced the belief that "Into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing that what is known ... this coefficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of his knowledge" (Polyani, 1966, p. 6). Terming such knowing as "tacit", Polanyi acknowledged subjective awareness as most responsible for keeping the conscious pursuits of individuals on track in their search for scientific discoveries.

Over the past 30 years, the methodological assumptions of the natural sciences have continued to hold considerable influence. Their once commanding presence, however, has given way to the present awareness of alternatives. A "paradigm of choices" ... with the recognition "that different methods are appropriate for different situations" has occurred more frequently (Patton, 1980, p. 20).

With acceptance of research alternatives, humanistic psychology has also remained true to its philosophical conceptualizations of humans; acknowledging humanness as distinguishable from thingness, and understanding life as needing to be experienced subjectively. By being aware of ourselves as being human first and scientific second, humanistic researchers are "intent on the discovery of methods within the highly subjective interchange of a relationship which will garner 'personal knowledge' of another human being" (Buhler & Allen, 1972, p. 24). Thus, the significance of experienced awareness including goals, values and meanings now represents appropriate human scientific research concerns.

Human Science Research and Qualitative Analysis

Giorgi (1979) has described the characteristics of human science research as including "meaning, description, qualitative differences, the process of explication, investigation, internal relations human phenomena, articulation of phenomena of consciousness and behavior within a context of broadened conception of nature, the primacy of relations, and the presence of an involved scientist" (p. 204). What is evident is the broadened appreciation of scientific objectivity, suggesting its existential realization. Moustakas (1969) noted that objectivity, in this light, involves "seeing what an experience 'is' for another person ... not its cause, its reason for existence, not its definition and classification. It means seeing attitudes, beliefs and feelings of the person as they exist at the moment, perceiving them whole, as a unity" (p. 18). Patton (1975) also has suggested that qualitative research leads to "empathic understandings of subjective (mental, not non-objective) states and the connection between subjective state and behavior" (p. 7).

Human experiences such as loneliness, unconditional love, shyness, self-actualization, sensitivity, rejection, feeling connected with nature, etc., become observable when they are qualitatively studied as experienced and defined by people living and working outside of the experimental laboratory (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Holding true to existential emphases, qualitative research invites participants to see themselves as co-researchers rather than as subjects or controls, each realizing him/herself as contributing participants in the creative process (Benne, 1975). Such direct research involvement respects the participants' uniqueness and facilitates their involvement "in non-controlling, non-manipulating ways, seeking to understand human beings from their own frame of reference" (Snyder, 1988, p. 39).

Acknowledging that qualitative methods have been contributed to and used by all major social sciences, Patton (1980) has identified qualitative / naturalistic paradigms using grounded theory. He defines grounded theory as a theoretical orientation in which hypotheses and concepts emerge from and relate to the data. This entails the use of methods which take the researcher into the closest proximity and most accurate reflection of the subject matter under investigation, thereby, grounding the investigative findings and conclusions in the "empirical world" (Patton, 1980, p. 67). Blumer (1978) underscores the value of this approach:

> The task of scientific study is to lift the veils that cover the area of group life that one proposes to study. The veils are not lifted by substituting, in whatever degree, pre-formed images for first-hand knowledge. The veils are lifted by getting close to the area and by digging deep in it through careful study. Schemes of methodology that do not encourage or allow this betray the cardinal principle of respecting the nature of one's empirical world ... The merit of naturalistic study is that it respects and stays close to the empirical domain (Blumer, 1978, p. 38).

Such statements closely parallel the views and research interests of humanistic psychology. From such perspectives, people are seen as behaving according to reality as they themselves perceive it, rather than as others perceive it. Thus, behaviors are governed by the unique perceptions of individuals relative to their experiences of themselves and the world in which they exist, and the meanings attributed to these experiences. To understand individuals, then, requires relationship and communication with them (Combs, Richards, & Richards, 1976).

Heuristic Research Model

Drawn from the Greek word heuretikos and meaning "I find" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40), heuristics represents a person-based, discovery process-oriented research approach. Deeply personal and subjectively determined, its primary methods which include awareness of oneself, sensitivity to others and openness to experience allow and challenge internal and self-reflective searching (Moustakas, 1967). Examinations of self-inquiry occur through the researcher's own senses, perceptions, intuitions, insights and feelings, as well as those of collaborating participants. Unlike other models, the heuristic method seeks for truth through deep subjectivity rather than external observations of measurable quantities. The personal experiences and attitudes of the heuristic researcher facilitate self-study and comprehending the experiences of others (Moustakas, 1994; 1990; 1967, 1961; Craig, 1978).

Implicit in the heuristic model, Moustakas (1990; 1967) presents passion, discipline and commitment as foundational qualities. Passion brings life to the study as it excites, energizes and moves. Research is dead without passion. Craig (1978) adds that passion emerges out of the researcher's own subjective and unique self-interests and preoccupations. Discipline is portrayed by Moustakas (1990; 1967) as being essentially responsible for the flow, order and vigor of the study as it progresses. Commitment is seen as follow-through; the heuristic researcher continually experiences those conditions that have been established through the design of the research.

Choosing a Methodology

The purpose of heuristic inquiry is "to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39). A qualifier for conducting heuristic research is that the researcher must have personally experienced the phenomena in question (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). A distinguishing feature of heuristic inquiry as compared to other qualitative methodologies is its emphasis on the passion of the researcher in making discoveries. As contrasted to phenomenology and grounded theory, heuristics maintains the essence of the person within the experience (Patton, 1990). Asking myself as a student of Counselling Psychology, "how visible do I want to be in this dissertation?" I decided that I wanted to be "in the middle of my Ph.D. research", and ultimately my passion for this topic made heuristics my choice of methodology.

Philosophically, the view in heuristics is that knowledge begins from within (Anderson, 1998). To have experienced something is to know it, at least implicitly. For example, how can you really know the suffering and pain of losing your rights unless you have experienced it, like an incarcerated criminal or an involuntarily committed psychiatric patient? How can you know the experience that derives from procrastination, unless you have gone through it? The self possesses knowledge about that which has been experienced. The internal heuristic search begins the unlocking of these inner truths.

Other methodologies require that the researcher stand back from the data to create greater objectivity in the analysis. In standing back, however, the ethnographer and phenomenologist may miss something of the culture or the person they are studying. If nothing else, the intensity or intimacy may be lacking, and there is something about an experience's intensity that is at the core of the very experience itself. Without intensity, experience is soon forgotten.

In contrast to hermaneutics, heuristics does not involve an interpretation of experience, nor does it look for how "history, art, politics, or other human enterprises account for and explain the meanings of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19). The stories of the people depicted in a heuristic study are *their* stories. It is *their* perspective that must be understood by the reader.

According to Moustakas (1990), there are six phases required of heuristic research, and a number of concepts and processes that underlie these phases.

Primary Research Phases

Moustakas (1990) has delineated six characteristic phases in the heuristic model for research: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. Delineation of these phases provides further awareness of the discipline, commitment and passion to this research process.

Initial Engagement

Initial engagement is the first phase of heuristic research. It occurs when the researcher "first becomes aware there is a particular issue or concern that he or she would like to understand more deeply and fully" (McCormack, 1994, p. 72). This phase ends once a research question of intense personal interest is found.

Immersion Phase

Immersion is the second phase of heuristic research and constitutes an internal process of open awareness and receptivity. The process of immersion is at once exciting, tantalizing and demanding. Ambiguity, apparent contradictions and ever-present temptations toward premature closure must be tolerated. Rogers (1968) likens the immersion process to that of a sponge soaking up the complexity of experience with its whole being and not merely its conscious mind. Relative to this study on how adults experience procrastination, immersion included gathering all of my notes, relevant readings and literature reviews, personal knowledge and experiences, transcriptions of dialogues with participants, etc. Through my immersion into these and other materials, research examinations over time led to a more intimate and encompassing awareness with "core themes and patterns".

The heuristic methods I used most extensively throughout this phase included indwelling, internal frame of referencing and self-disclosure.

Indwelling

Indwelling represents a disciplined suspension and departure from the generality of immersion in order to grasp a particular part of the whole. Such conscious pausing and dwelling "to look at, feel, take in and bond with" (Brewster, 1990, p. 31) the phenomenon better enabled me to perceive the different layers and depths, subtleties and meanings which the particular data of the participants presented. As applied, indwelling added the connecting bond with immersion, the unit of study and myself.

Internal Frame of Reference

This method grows from the belief that awareness exists within the individual. Knowledge, as such, rests on the subjective. Rogers (1961; 1968) presents the internal frame of reference as an essential construct in the recognition and reporting of the private world of the person. Thoughts, attitudes, motives and feelings are some of the elemental constituents in the unique world of subjectively understood awareness and meaning.

In understanding the meanings of participants' experiences with procrastination, I raised questions related to their unique experiences. Consequent understandings were based upon that which the participants and I perceived together. The use of this procedure was restricted to describing the essentials of the procrastination experiences rather than attempting to explain or analyze the phenomenon per se. Resting solidly upon the tenet that knowing is derived from the personal viewpoint / perceptions of the knower, this method provided me with a tangible means for checking conclusions, thoughts and discoveries with the research participants. Furthermore, it facilitated positive shifts in my sense of direction, and challenged me toward the consideration of new perspectives.

I used the internal frame of reference, self-disclosure, reflective listening and intersubjectivity in each of the person-to-person contacts, sharing my perspectives in the course of the interview through conversation, through first person accounts of their worlds, and seeking to understand their reality. Reflecting on experience also facilitated the validation process providing me with an avenue through which I gradually organized my entire realm of understanding; considering, valuing and expanding upon the many characteristic aspects emerging from this ongoing journey.

Self-Disclosure

This method involves a relationship-engendering process facilitating openness and dialogue between researcher and participants. While it may facilitate "richer and fuller descriptive material" (Synder, 1988, p. 50), it also suggests both an invitation and willingness to relate more authentically. Through self-disclosures, the statuses of researcher and participants were equalized. Noting self-disclosure as "the act of making yourself manifest, showing yourself so others can perceive you" (Jourard, 1971, p. 19), my initial disclosing took place at the time of our first meeting.

Incubation Phase

The third phase of the method is incubation, the waiting phase in heuristic research in which faith and patience facilitate new awareness and meanings when there is no tangible evidence that anything is happening. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) have called this phase one of permission and allowance, noting "focused attentiveness and internal alertness" as more promising guides toward revelations of meaning than "predetermined methods and procedures" (p. 49).

Synder (1988) has portrayed incubation as a period and place of deliberate defocusing where the researcher moves away from saturation resulting from immersion. Noting that such purposeful pausing or engaging in other activities itself proves illuminating, his paradoxical depiction reminded me of times when I was engaged in efforts to recall a name. Bearing down only produced more frustration. However, when I surrendered my struggle, my memory of the name often followed. Moustakas, as noted by Synder (1988), also suggests that this rhythm of release / reception in stating the importance of "permitting the glimmerings and awakenings to form, allowing the birth of understanding to take place in its own readiness and completeness" (p. 44).

Incubation relative to this study occurred during periods when I was directly or immediately focused on the interests or concerns over the materials related to the research. Whether waiting absentmindedly at a traffic light, enjoying the sunshine, or away on a pleasant weekend or afternoon outing, thoughts and intuitions, tacit knowing and realizations came suddenly to mind. From such serendipitous moments, my mind and attention were drawn further toward a better understanding of the subject of procrastination.

Self-Dialogue

One method I perceived as particularly useful during this second phase was self-dialogue. This method involved deliberate inner self-reflection. This process required the discipline of taking myself seriously when I was committed to recording my inner statements. Synder (1988) referred to this process as involving stimulating and clarifying conversations within ourselves which promotes additional understanding within our inner frames of reference.

From the deliberate recordings of my self-dialogue, new leads occurred and broadened my understanding and awareness of this topic.

Illumination Phase

This fourth phase represents the rushing in and opening up of new insights, awareness and understanding. Brewster (1990) depicted illumination as the point where the researcher's and participant's experiences "begin to bloom", where awareness of knowing surfaces, and the knowing becomes more clear and conscious. Synder (1988) has likened illumination to a point of breakthrough where new light is introduced. Developing the felt sense "I've got it!", Synder (1988) portrayed this phase as generating affective excitement and renewed energy. During this phase, the core themes began to emerge.

Tacit Knowing

Tacit knowing represents personal, subjectively experienced internal knowing associated with "gut" feelings and intuitions. These inner understandings illuminated the way to the emergence of new knowledge. Polyani (1962) believed that present in every act of knowing is the tacit dimension of awareness / understanding, which he asserts is a vital, passionate component of research knowledge. When I turned toward the task of presenting, distilling and synthesizing my research data and findings, intuition and tacit knowing exerted subtle yet, forceful impact.

Explication Phase

Explication occurs when newly illuminated knowing begins to be explained and represented. Here again, self-dialogue, disclosing, intuition and tacit knowing serve to organize emerging themes. Individual portraits were developed, symbolizing and reflecting the newly emerging experiential themes and meanings. My views and perceptions linking with the understandings of participants' experiences developed into additional meanings of the shared experience. From individual portraits to total group representations, the overall research outcome of experience came together with reflective portraits used to describe the findings and conclusions.

Intersubjectivity

Drawn from existentialism, intersubjectivity has been likened to an I-thou mutuality of relationship (Brewster, 1990) and involves feelings, thoughts and understanding exchanged between open and revealing individuals (Synder, 1988). This method supports appreciation of universal themes and patterns. Brewster (1990) notes intersubjectivity as facilitating the linking together of participant awareness with the researchers to develop new meanings and shared experiences. For this study, those intersubjective processes enabled me to feel known and knowing, understanding and understood, separate from and together with the participants and their experiential disclosings.

Creative Synthesis Phase

Creative synthesis represents the challenging work of defining and depicting the nature of experience under study. It represents a refinement of individual participants' patterns of experience and yields a whole greater than the sum of its parts. As Moustakas (1981) notes, synthesis means more than distillation of themes and patterns, more than "summary or recapitulation" (p. 60). This study was designed to generate new reality, moving beyond what is known about procrastination towards a realization of what remains to be learned. Challenging me toward discovering and developing the heart of the procrastinator's experience, this final phase represents an "awakening", leading me toward new meaning and frame of referencing which may be represented through art and metaphor (Snyder, 1988, p. 46). Relevant methods include tacit knowing, intuition, and creative expression.

Intuition

Intuition adds a creative spark with this research process and the final phase of synthesis. Implemented as a non-linear, unplanned and spontaneous process, intuition assists in the creation of different groupings of data. Intuition points toward new directions, supplying fresh energy which is directed into the creative process. The process of intuition and its expression embodied the complex process of risking, which is at the heart of creativity.

Methods, Procedures and the Research Process

This section outlines the methods and procedures used in collecting, analyzing and synthesizing the research data relating to the question, "How do adults experience chronic procrastination?" The model, emerging from participant dialogue, is depicted in the following section. This section charts the journey toward achieving awareness, insights and intuitive understanding. The methodological concerns of (1) self-preparation, (2) selection of participants, (3) participant profiles, (4) setting of research interviews, (5) data collection and interview procedures and (6) analysis and synthesis of the data comprise the remainder of this section.

Self-Preparation

My purpose in doing this research was to more fully realize and heighten my personal views, understandings and experiences relative to procrastination. I kept a journal of internal processes - jotting down related thoughts, feelings, fantasies, dream recollections, etc. I also used a microcassette recorder for taping spontaneous intuitions, awareness and insights that occurred. Another method of self-preparation involved the use of focused attention, quieting myself and the space around me and relaxing and reflecting upon my process and progress.

Personal Reflections

Procrastination? I thought I knew what it was ... but now I wonder? What can I learn from my procrastination? How does procrastination affect my life? What is it like to procrastinate? When thinking about procrastination, what comes to mind? How is procrastination defined? Does everyone procrastinate? Do the behaviors that define procrastination have a different meaning if those behaviors are not perceived of as a problem?

Recalling my early history as a student and remembering my relationships with most teachers, I am struck now by how many there were who assumed my procrastination as their personal challenge. Trying to somehow move me past my underachieving patterns, most teachers presented a "no holds barred" determination to have me reach my potential regardless of the consequences. Virtually always, their efforts gave way over time to a mood of irritability and finally a declaration that "the kid just doesn't care." After many similar pronouncements from frustrated teachers, and on occasion from my parents, I learned to imagine my truth about myself; I am a procrastinator!

Years later, as I finally came to see education as an opportunity to learn things I wanted to know, this belief began to change. Through two undergraduate and master's degree programs, I found myself beginning to believe in scholarship as an attainable goal. These past years of graduate study have continued adding to that attitude.

Nonetheless, I remain aware of myself as a person who continues to struggle against a tendency to put things off. Such thoughts as, "Just five more minutes and I'll get down to work," "Tomorrow for sure" and "No later than this weekend" have been repeated endless times, signaling my discomfort with my tendency to postpone action. Since childhood, I have remained an individual who decides to avoid decisions when that involves getting underway on concerns of real importance. Rather than beginning on schedule, I too often find myself engaging in imaginative excuses. Illusions of "what might have been" if only I'd begun on time or remained true to the work until finished, continue to occupy my reveries.

After years of this, I have grown vigilant to my tendencies toward avoiding work that I realize must be done. Yet, in an instant, I can still become "caught up" and "carried away" with anxiety-avoiding distractions. Imagining that "in a couple of minutes I'll return to this task" presents a fantasy I have come to suspect and even fear.

My getting underway with this study itself understates this very process. The desire to study procrastination goes back to when I found myself struggling with eleventh-hour course work completions to achieve an undergraduate degree in psychology. During this period, I was directly confronted with the strength of my ability to procrastinate. Recognizing that it was no longer my father's and mother's image that inhibited me from achievement, but this part of my own self, I knew this life reality both deserved and was growing to demand more rigorous examination. At this point, I began reading various literature concerning procrastination. I found similarities among their claims and contents, but no resolution. During this period, however, I did begin to find the courage necessary to confront the phenomenon more directly.

Having reached a turning point with my acceptance into the Counselling Psychology Doctoral Program, I was no longer willing to continue leading a life based more on illusion than reality. After being tenuous and anxious, avoiding decisions and deadlines, I wanted to prove myself to be an adult capable of being able to succeed rather than just survive. Professionally, with clients trusting my judgments and actions, I confronted the challenges of pushing ahead, one day at a time. I began to understand the possibility that the procrastination issue would prove as rewarding a subject of study as it is anxiety-arousing.

Some three years into my doctoral studies, I initiated efforts toward understanding this life pattern. I engaged in dialogue with course instructors and re-evaluated what I had read previously on procrastination. It was important to study procrastination which, by virtue of my own emotional participation in and with it, had become a part of my own personality and history. I based this undertaking on the person I am now "rather than that person {I} would like to be" (Rogers, 1961, p. 67). Recognizing is different than realizing, however, and from this early beginning there followed more lonely encounters with self-doubt, confusion and despair; where feelings such as "being out of place", "merely drifting" or "endlessly seeking beginning" dominated much of my inner experience. By noting such inner struggles, rather than avoiding or denying them, I have found myself moving forward in more self-directed ways.

In repeatedly finding myself procrastinating, I have learned to appreciate the value of staying with the process, growing and learning from it. Since I am aware of both the person I am and the person I would like to become, this choice of research topic promises to help bridge the difference that exists in this internal separation. I am aware that this study will prove as much my personal story as an individual who tends to procrastinate as it will prove a searching and scholarly examination of this phenomenon.

The challenge of this study then is to examine the self-reports of the experiences of self-identified chronic procrastinators in order to identify commonalties and differences that will lead to a better understanding of the problem of procrastination. The purpose is to generate both theoretical and practical knowledge that will facilitate more satisfactory resolution to this debilitating condition.

Selection of Participants

In this study, I refer to myself as researcher and all the other co-researchers as participants, as I am the creator who has been ultimately responsible for what evolved from this research process. In selecting adults who identify strongly with having chronic procrastination life patterns to serve as participants for this study, I sought individuals who had some degree of self-awareness and were able to reflect on this aspect of their lives. I believed that their ability to reflect upon and discuss these procrastination patterns proved vital in our work together. I wanted participants who were articulate and readily available for interviewing. Adults meeting these criteria were selected from volunteers of University of Alberta students, past and / or present professional associates and other individuals interested in participating in this study.

A total of five adults agreed to participate in this study. This number is comparable to the numbers used in similar qualitative research studies (Brewster, 1990; Synder, 1988; Craig, 1978). Five participants ultimately proved to be sufficient because of redundancy in the data.

The selection of participants began through informal discussions with individuals already known to me who appeared to fit the aforementioned profile. After reviewing twenty potential participants, I contacted twelve interested individuals by telephone or in person in order to further share my plans for the study. Five individuals who initially agreed to participate were contacted one week later for the purpose of confirming their desire to participate. A more thorough explanation of participant expectations was provided at that time (Appendix A). During an initial meeting, participants were asked to sign consent forms giving permission to use all interview materials for the study and then were asked how they would like to be identified in the study. Confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms.

Participant Profiles

The participants consisted of three males and two females. They ranged in age from 27 to 56 years at the time of the study with a mean age of 39.8 years (one in the 20's, two in their 30's, and two in their 50's). One was single, two were married, and two were divorced. Three reported having no children, one had one child, and one had two children. One of the participants still had a child at home. Occupations reported by the participants included student, actor, health care worker, counsellor, and government employee. The formal education level ranged from high school diploma to master's degree (one high school diploma, one college diploma, two university bachelor degrees, and one master's degree). As the majority of these adults worked or intend to work as professionals in the human services area, their training and analytical skills proved to be an advantage in their ability to describe their experiences.

The length of procrastination experiences was difficult to calculate accurately, however, all of the participants reported that they have been involved in chronic procrastination patterns during most of their early adolescence and continuing into their adult years. It should also be noted that two participants reported that they had received counselling previously for issues other than procrastination, although none of the participants was currently involved in counselling for procrastination.

Data Collection Procedures

The interviews took place at the University of Alberta Education Clinic. The location offered quiet, privacy and comfort. Formal data collection and recording began with an orientation, description of the study, and obtaining informed consent. The objectives for the first meeting included introductions, acknowledgments of the concept and importance of participants, and a review of participation requirements. The research goals were also discussed. A one-page consent to participate form (Appendix B) describing responsibilities (i.e., agreement to participate in meetings and interviews and permission to tape and duplicate all conversations for dissertation purposes) was reviewed and signed. Once this was completed, the data-gathering interview commenced. A second meeting was arranged to provide an opportunity to review the findings. This meeting was also tape-recorded once consent was given.

Individual interviews were conducted over the period of one month. The interviews were open-ended. Throughout each of the interviews, I attempted to remain as aware and open toward the participants and myself as possible. I intended to work toward creating and maintaining a climate that encouraged participants to respond, as Moustakas (1990) has stated, "comfortably, accurately, comprehensively and honestly" in depicting their experiences with procrastination.

In the interview, I asked each participant to describe their experiences with procrastination as fully as possible (see Appendix C). Active and empathic listening facilitated this process. I attempted to remain free and flexible toward varying interview procedures in response to what the flow of the dialogue appeared to require. Occasionally, dialogue was enhanced by my use of clarifying or guiding questions. In all instances, the questions remained directed toward allowing individual views, awareness and insights to emerge more fully. I scheduled the interviews for two-hour periods in order to repeatedly examine and check information as it was received during the course of the exchanges. Through this process, I believe that I was able to verify my understanding of each participant's views from his or her internal frame of reference. The attitude and perspective that I held were to be present to listen and learn, and the participants present to give expression to their experiences.

Analysis and Synthesis of the Data

Analysis and synthesis of the data took place through the following eight-step process. Audio-taped interviews were transcribed into text for analysis. First, I placed before me all of the data that I obtained from one individual participant. This included a written transcript of his or her statements from the initial meeting, the recorded tapes and my personal notes, which I recorded during and after these data gathering sessions.

Next, I immersed myself in this material review until I felt I had a clear awareness and understanding of what had been said. In instances where my efforts toward understanding were not met, I checked with the participant until clarification and understanding were reached.

In the third step, I moved away from this material completely for several weeks. Following this period, I returned to the material and immersed myself again. At this point, I recorded any new awareness I had and identified the dominant qualities and themes suggested by the data. I followed this immersion-incubation-immersion rhythm until my perceptions into this individual's experiences with procrastination appeared to reflect all the essential experiential components.

In the fourth step, I returned again to the raw data and reviewed the taped and transcribed statements for congruence and fit. Where congruence seemed questionable, my interpretations were shared with participants to obtain their validation of accuracy and comprehensiveness. Additions or deletions were made where participants indicated that it was appropriate. Also, experiential descriptions were illustrated with verbatim interview samples to highlight and illustrate the participant's experience with procrastination.

The fifth step involved the repetition of these earlier steps in the process until I had constructed an individual description for each of the participants and for myself.

The sixth step involved gathering each one of the completed experiential descriptions before me. Then I again entered into immersion and incubation processes until a comprehensive understanding of the individual experiences emerged. A final description reflected the core elements of all individuals' experiences, representing the common themes and awareness experienced by the research participants. Included in this composite picture were descriptive accounts and verbatim excerpts illustrating "the flow, spirit and life inherent in the experience" (Moustakas, 1990).

In step seven, I returned again to the raw data. I selected material from one of the participants which struck me as most exemplifying the total group's experiences and examined my own experience during this process, developing two exemplary portraits. Moustakas (1990) notes that these individual portraits need to be presented in a manner where both the studied phenomenon and individual participants "emerge as personal and real".

Finally, in step eight, I summarized my own process, tapping as Moustakas (1990) has suggested, "imaginative and contemplative sources of knowledge and light in synthesizing the experience, in presenting the discoverings of essence - peaks and valleys, highlights and horizons" (p. 31) related to all the work that had been done.

Having presented the methods and procedures used in collecting, analyzing and synthesizing the data, I will now describe how adults experience chronic procrastination based on my interview data.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Describing the Experience of Chronic Procrastination

> Everything that is experienced is experienced by oneself, and it is part of its meaning that it belongs to the unity of this self and thus contains an inalienable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life. Thus its being is not exhausted in what can be said of it and in what can be grasped as its meaning. The autobiographical or biographical reflection, in which its meaning is determined, remains fused with the whole movement of life and constantly, accompanies it. It is practically the mode of being of experience to be so determinative that one is never finished with it (Gadamer, 1986, p. 60).

The intent of this study was to access the experiences of those who identify themselves as chronic procrastinators, with the objective of understanding their experiences as procrastinators. Gaining access to the experiences of others presents the first step in the process, a step that requires some explanation. As it is probably impossible to gain direct access to others' experiences, various means have been devised to obtain records of those experiences for one reason or another. Some of these include objective tests that often ask individuals to make a response to a series of carefully devised questions, which are then fitted into the form of a profile. Others use physical or mechanical means to identify certain patterns, such as the polygraph or EEG. In each of these examples a type of mapping of the experiences occurs, and from these maps, inferences are drawn.

Personal descriptions of the experiences of the participants provide the basic map. However, in this form the descriptions are relatively unhelpful, rather like looking at a protocol of a psychological test before the information has been compared with normative data.

Through in depth interviews, the participants were asked to describe their experiences and their descriptive statements were organized by content and placed into content classes by the researcher. This classification of common descriptions then points to the dominant features about these experiences from the original data. In this research the groupings are referred to as themes. However, having the map with dominant features only begins the process, as the next step requires that certain inferences be made that may lead to some form of practical and / or theoretical knowledge. This is the course of action that was followed in this study.

The essential "peaks and valleys" experienced by adults who identify themselves as experiencing chronic procrastination are presented. Six core themes were identified, each exemplified through verbatim participant excerpts. Together, these excerpts serve to identify the individual thematic structures and their impact. Following these thematic descriptions, two portraits of participants are developed to further exemplify participant's experiences with chronic procrastination. A composite depiction provides an overview to enhance the reader's appreciation of this phenomenon. The themes of Time, Deadlines, Avoidance, Expectations, Emotion, and Interpersonal Consequences were identified from the descriptions of procrastination experiences.

Thematic Descriptions

Time

Virtually all interview passages of any length revealed time as a dominant focus having impact upon the individuals' actions, feelings and thoughts. This first theme was described in depth by all of the participants. Within the context of personal experience with time, the participants attempted to use organizational skills. However, they described difficulty with this process as their sense of time was distorted.

Organization / Rationalization

Despite good intentions to complete tasks, participant's attempted and intended to use organizational strategies to assist them in staying on track. Although they attempted to plan ahead, they were generally unsuccessful.

> I say this often, "I need to do this. I have to do this. I have to set time aside and do it!" So I try to sometimes make a list for myself. But then often if I don't go by the list I find myself thinking, "No! No!" especially if I have a day set up. I do it more in my head. "I'll do this between two and three. I'll leave here, and I'll go there, and this is my time for study ... to do homework." But then I end up doing something else. I push my schedule. I change it around, you know, as it comes up. "Well, this is really what I want to do, so I'll just put studying off until a little bit later."

> I'm an incredibly poor estimator of my own abilities in terms of the timeliness, like how long it takes me to do something. I'll volunteer to do something thinking, "Well, I can fit this in here or there," and here or there comes along, and it is always shorter than I planned because of X, Y and Z, and everything sort of gets bumped along.

> I keep a calendar ... of all the things I have to do in school. I'll put on the weekend certain things that I'm going to do, you know, I have a paper that I'm going to start doing research on, you know, go to the library, etc. Then I don't end up doing it and like, I'll do it the next weekend because the deadline's not ... it's like a month away. So I guess when I write that down it's not permanent ... I know that it's not for real, that it's not an actual deadline that I have to go by when I write it down.

Distortion

Time is perceived differently in accordance to proximity to the present. The participants described the illusion of being able to create the time required to complete specific tasks or goals, however, impending deadlines did not appear real until they were within a critical period.

> It's like I'm afraid to look at the calendar. I don't want to. I panic. I'll turn my head around and say, "Dear God, if I turn my head around and there's a Christmas tree in the

window ... " Oh, it's not even school yet, oh, okay, so there's still time. Okay. But the sense, I have to remind myself sometimes to think of time.

Sometimes time flies. It just flies because I'm going to do this work, and I'm sitting there, and I pick up all these other things to do, and all of a sudden I've been doing all these other things, and I'm not aware that I just spent three hours organizing my desk. And all of a sudden it's too late. I have to go somewhere else. Then other times it can be painful, like I'm just sitting there. Time goes so slow! I'm going to do something, and I think, "Oh, I can't do it right." Or, "How am I going to do these progress notes? Oh my God, is this the right way to say it?" And then I think when you get down ... to tasks, time is so slow because it is so painful ... you feel like every little nuance ... that task, I forced it. Like I always think, "Okay, I'm going to put handcuffs on and chain myself to the chair ... and sit there with the paper." But then when I start to, well, just "We're going to clear the desk a little bit." Oh my God! Three hours, it's time to go! I'm late for a dinner engagement.

It is kind of like, uh, this insidious kind of thing that just builds up slowly. It's like, "Well, it's not that far behind and I'll be able to do this by such and such a day or next week or ... you know". I'm busy doing this now ... I can do this for a while ... and then get together this list of what I really didn't do, that now I need to do, and I am surprised. I am really surprised that I let it go that much. I really did fool myself ... "Oh God, I've got a lot to do now!"

I figure out in my head that it would work out. "If I leave at this certain time, I should get somewhere," you know? If I have to be somewhere at 2:30, well, if I leave at a quarter after I should be there by 2:30. But somehow, you know, I'm tied up and it's probably doing some of those little things that I get tied up doing ... I'm running a little behind, and I find myself racing to get somewhere...

Participants expressed difficulty and confusion with time awareness. For the procrastinating individual, time may be regarded as vague, suspect, fragmented and deceptive. Regarding task timelines, little realistic sense of time or its passage seems evident. Depending upon the participants' frame of mind, the required tasks and pleasure associated with completing the task, time could be experienced as variable, either extremely fast or painstakingly slow. Without time awareness or with inaccurate awareness of time, avoidance became easier. Participants indicated that while time initially felt limitless, the perception of time changed with the approach of deadlines to become debilitating or highly anxiety provoking. Such actions oftentimes prove self-defeating, contributing to feelings of guilt, shame and personal distrust.

Expressing bewilderment with time awareness, procrastinating individuals, though committed toward staying true to schedule or promise, nonetheless seem incapable of actions consistent with these intentions. Instead, activity gravitates toward anxiety reducing actions to seek immediate relief. Participants seemed unable to incorporate techniques or means that could potentially alter their patterns.

For the procrastinating individual, an appropriate time sense appears to be missing. Most find avoidance as relatively successful until such time as deadlines close in. Such pockets of relief may appear clustered around initial task awareness periods up to or just past the midpoint positions of time remaining. Again, such relief through distraction may be experienced as temporarily relieving anxiety, only to find that the anxiety has been postponed to a future time. Initially, the time remaining before completion required seems so infinite that distraction to preferred activity is easy and comfortable.

Deadlines

Successfully meeting deadlines, which appears to be one of the fundamental expectations of North American society, was highly related to the personal experience of time. Two subthemes emerged that contributed to successful completion of tasks and goals within a specified period of time.

Proximity of Deadline

Deadlines were a significant issue for all participants. For some, the closer the proximity to the deadline and the narrower the window was for avoiding the task, the more successful they were in meeting expectations for completion. For others, the closer the proximity of the deadline, the more difficult it became to get on task.

> Just the feeling of having that deadline ... I know that I have to get things done. I know I have to do it. And it's like I don't want anything to get in the way. So, if something does ... I can't stand it. I got to do this. I got to do this. I got to go; you know what I mean? I'm real quick about things.

> For the last couple of weekends, I've gone into work to do my work and I haven't gotten much done. It takes me three hours to just settle down! And by that time, it's time to leave, unless I'm really under the gun, you know? They say, "You have to have this done by two weeks." Like they say for (pay) checks, "You have to have it done by this date." Well, yeah, by this date two nights in a row, but now I don't do that ...

> If it's close enough to the time, being due tomorrow, I know that I would have to; I would just have to work through it until I was finished whether I was up all night doing it. There's nothing that at that point can distract me ... where if the deadline was not close and I worked on it and I took a break and I found something else, where I was talking to my roommates or whatever, found something else that was a little more interesting to me, then I'd stick with it and go for a while without thinking. "Ah, it's not due till next week. I don't have to worry about it. I'll just get to it later." But if I know it's due tomorrow, I will do it and will stick to it cause it's something I know has to get done.

> (When it's the night before the deadline) something does seem to like takeover, and I, I just get it done. Yeah, and some of those thoughts I think are still popping in. "You're not good enough. You're not good enough." But I don't care ... I'm thinking, "Just get the damn thing done and put it in."

Contribution to Motivation

Deadlines for most of the participants provided a context that increased focus and attention on a specific task or goal in a way that they were not capable of prior to the existence of the externally imposed deadline.

> I hit a point, and I'm not exactly sure of that point, what that point is, where I hit a critical time point. Especially if there is a deadline that cannot be moved where I simply have to do it ... Then what happens is I move into whatever that task is, whatever I'm supposed to do.

> I think space is very similar to time. At the beginning there is lots of it ... I can wander out over the terrain, in any direction, and often do. Um, I'll dance with a number of different things, and I think once then as the process continues and, ah, perhaps the

> dancing gets more frantic as I realize there's a deadline approaching, then the space narrows down ... there's a path that's very clear for me. And I do focus and everything else really recedes. So that I, I, the space condenses, and I can see the path to completion
>
> A couple of years ago ... I worked at that clinic where if you didn't have all your charts within 30 days of being up to date you didn't get your paycheck. And so, the last Sunday of the month before ... the review or audit, I would be there from one or two o'clock in the afternoon until maybe ten o'clock at night. I probably could have done the work needed in three or four hours, but I was out there eight or ten hours fighting and struggling and going through these contortions to get that work done. I always promised myself it would be different ... But since my commitment was never to have each week done at the end of each week, at the end of the month there was always some catch up, always. And that went on until I left the clinic.
>
> Time to completion ... Once that becomes critical, critical meaning there's no slack, then I go after it usually. There are probably cases that I don't. But that probably means that the end point isn't fixed, you know, can slide...
>
> I don't feel guilty until ... the deadline gets closer. As the deadline gets closer, I know I have to hustle, and I have to get doing it. So that's when I do it. When I know when I have a little bit of pressure that I'm dealing with. And I think that also makes ... that may be where I can move better. Where I'm under a little bit of pressure, and I know I have to get it done.

As deadlines close in, participants indicated that their anxiety levels increased. For some, distractions became more difficult to engage in and often more frantic. When attention was finally directed toward the required task, it was often accompanied with a great deal of discomfort. This discomfort along with heightened anxiety further detracted from performance, even though occasionally the same condition appeared to actually facilitate performance.

Prior to the deadline, some participants engaged in completing mini-tasks that enabled them to feel as if they had accomplished something while in reality, the initial task was unaddressed. Completion of the mini-tasks provided a sense of relief from the immediate discomfort being experienced. For others, the approaching deadline and narrowing of time allowed them to mobilize, focus and ultimately complete the task successfully.

Avoidance

Participants related a constant struggle between being on task and wanting the relief that the avoidance provided. The participants reported that there was a powerful draw to escape from the discomfort of not having completed assigned tasks. The methods of avoidance that participants used varied but ultimately they each lead to the same outcome.

Seeking Control

Participants actively and constantly attempted to obtain and maintain control of their activities. Each identified an awareness of the struggle for control in their lives and the impact the sense of control had on their perceptions of themselves as individuals.

> I'm not feeling the feelings for those minutes when I'm writing or calling. And even though it's like, like these, every once in awhile this little thing will pop in and it will go, "Okay, you still have that to do." But you know, I still can put it aside ... I can block when I do this. Because I feel in control, and I think being in control really helps me ... like I'm trying not to feel bad about myself, which is what this thing over here is. I'm feeling, feeling inadequate, insecure, all of those things by doing this. So I get myself in control, and then I'm feeling good about myself. I'm not going to feel those things!

> I then oftentimes choose to do something where I feel in control. And then maybe I'm able to see "Okay, I'm organized. I'm not so bad, here I'm organized." Or, "I write well in this thing" or whatever. It's like I have to remove myself from that procrastination place, you know? Well, actually then I really am in that procrastination place because then I really am putting off what I need to do.

> I know procrastination is happening but I don't want it to happen. I want to get rid of it. And the main channel I have to get rid of it is to deny it. And that only increases its power ... and denying it I ... its similar to an addiction you know? I feel in some way like the addicts I have worked with because they want to deny how helpless and powerless they are with their substance abuse. And they naturally seek that as shelter. And of course it's an illusion and a fantasy of shelter. There isn't a safe harbor. And that's the same thing for me. I mean, I want to deny it and, and somehow think my magic will

protect me against this possession by denying that it is. And then I'm feeding right into it.

And it's really hard to get it to stop. And yet when I do something completely different and very focused and maybe where I feel in control, then that's ... that's what stops it.

I feel like procrastination comes on suddenly. It kind of melts and fades in very suddenly. But it's subtle. In other words, it's not, there's no shock wave to it. It's all of a sudden.

Postponing Strategies

The avoidance strategies identified in this study were varied and extensive. What may on the surface have appeared to be beneficial in terms of identifying what needed to be done was actually used as a method of putting off what needed to be completed. External pressures appeared to determine the tasks chosen to be completed rather than internal determinations of what was important to complete.

If I had an idea that I was going to do my report in five minutes, then lots of clutter could emerge. And, oh, could be anything ... that will pop up, smaller things, but they'll distract me. Often, things that I see ... reminders of things that need to be done. So that will draw me away, and then the five-minute will elapse, and I will perhaps forget or perhaps I will rationalize by saying, "As soon as I get this done, then I will go back to writing." Well "then" may never occur because other things may pop up ... like these little things come up and grab my shoelaces, and then I have to stay there and attend to them. Or tie my shoelaces, as the case may be.

In general in my house the dishes will all be done ... I think in the face of not completing something large, I need to complete something small. To feel good about it or a little bit about the way that I am. There were lots of little rewards that I could substitute for something that I hadn't done.

I rationalize it with other tasks, you know, that have to be done sooner or later. Because there are, you know, this is a multi-task system with deadlines on all of these. And so I can always say, "Well I have to finish my progress notes and reports so that I get paid, so that I can pay the mortgage and that's more important right now than working on my paper or whatever."

I know there's part of me that says, "Well, face it and just do something about it." But I don't and I just want to run away. And sometimes I will. Or sometimes I say, "Okay, you feel this way today. That's it, blow it off. Start again tomorrow!" Ah, that's you know, a way of rescuing myself: "Really face it though tomorrow," see, "Tomorrow you're gonna really do it, but today you're just, you're gonna give yourself a break. You don't want to keep feeling this terrible." So I come up with some rationale, some plan for doing it but getting out of this feeling right now.

It's easier for me to deal with not being aware. I have to; I'm very visual, so if I have a list, so if I have a list, if I make a list, I keep looking at the list. It keeps reminding me, and I do the things that are on the list. So I'll manage not to put this on the list or I'll put this on a list that I will then lose.

And then I would, you know, go back to the example of sitting at my desk and attempting to read or write something. And the anxiety will descend on me. And I'll say, "Oh well, it's time for a snack." And I'll go into the kitchen. The anxiety will go away as I start making a snack. Or, "I need some fresh air", so I leave the room. So there's this, this, this lie that I live with that the anxiety is the chair sitting in front of my desk. And I just need to get out of the chair and everything will be fine. So just trot away and all fine. "Such a great myth, huh?"

Escape to Comfort Zone

One of the most compelling aspects of avoidance reported by all the participants was the strong desire to alleviate any form or sense of discomfort as it related to procrastination. In addition, each participant indicated that they were acutely aware of the feelings of anxiety and discomfort and of their tendency of avoidance.

The very reason I didn't go back to school for a lot of years is because I really didn't believe that I could cut it, that I could make the grade. Even though I know intelligence wise I have it over a lot of other people ... application is another problem. Concentration is another problem. The application of that intelligence, putting down on paper, something I can't always do. It's hard. It's not there all the time. You find that comfort zone and you lay there. You stay away from that difficulty. Absolutely.

It's almost like feeding into it, the things that you're doing you feel good about because they need to be done maybe. Not that they have to be done then ... I am doing something good. I'm not getting what I said done. But I'm getting something done. So it's that okay feeling again, you know? It's okay. I'm doing something. I'm pulling weeds in the garden. I'm doing something.

I really want to leave the space I'm in, as if the space is causing it ... I want to change the space. I want to go somewhere else, get away ...avoid the space that the anxiety occurs in and you'll cure the anxiety. And in a real way that would happen.

I hate the anxiety. I hate; I hate that feeling, and I want at that moment to get rid of that feeling. Put it somewhere else and feel something else.

That one moment, when the anxiety really hits, when I feel real anxious and real uncomfortable about the situation, I immediately go to pleasure. I get away from anxiety. Like that's so painful, I go from pain to pleasure.

I couldn't sit and study because of the anxiety. So I would say, "Oh, I'll study; I won't this afternoon; it's too nice out. I'll go outside, and I'll walk around." Or I would go play with the dog and say, "Ah, the exercise will be good for me. I'll practice and study later on."

Diversion

Participants indicated that they felt exceptionally skilled at finding diversions regardless of setting or situation. Sometimes finding diversions was a conscious choice while at other times they appeared to spontaneously occur. Regardless of the way that these diversions occurred, they provided relief temporarily through the avoidance of the assigned task.

I'm not in clock time anymore. I'm in some eternal time with procrastination. The diversions of procrastination could be endless; just keep on doing something, you know, different hour after hour after hour after hour after hour ...I'm just losing myself into the diversions, and therefore out of clock time...Just like (Sisyphus') boulder which is eternally going up and down, I'm in something that feels like its timeless, and I'm just spending time with each molecule of this boulder now. The molecule happens to be that trash can that needs to be emptied. Another molecule happens to be writing down my son's telephone number which I haven't put in my rolodex yet, you know. So on and so forth, those are all molecules of the boulder.

This little thing that I'm attending to really won't delay me very much. And then of course there's the next little thing that, well, it's not that big a thing to do either, and I can do that as well ... Then I look up and discover that several hours elapsed, and it's time to go for lunch or something.

I feel, I don't know if comfortable is the word, but comfortably off in my diversion ...my diversions are satisfying to me...because they are accomplishing things, where I'm not with my procrastinated task.

> And then, as I'm feeling that anxiety I'm beginning to get uncomfortable. And I begin to wander. I begin to wander with my thinking and I begin to wander with my actions. The wandering takes the form sometimes of just daydreaming. Or it takes the form of diversions. And that could be anything ...and then, as I get caught up in the tasks, I feel a sense of relief ...satisfied in that accomplishment.

Short-term relief

All participants indicated that their avoidance behaviors provided them with temporary relief from their increasing state of anxiety that resulted from the assigned task. Short-term benefits with long-term consequences were consistently identified.

> Well clearly, on a very basic level, there's a diminution of anxiety and fear. If I stop doing that which I am afraid of, then I stop feeling badly. So that the short-term gain is it minimizes bad feelings, 'tho the cost to it is guilt, shame and low feelings of self-worth.

> It's being addicted to relief.

> It can overtake you. Absolutely. Sure it can. And that's not unlike any other addiction. They creep up on you again if you don't watch yourself.

> I think that there is an addiction ... and sooner or later some people, because of that addiction and the time factor get to the point where you almost can't get out of it. That's the essence I think, the essence of something that is so devastating.

> It's like the guy going to AA saying, "I'm an alcoholic at every meeting ..." That's kind of like it. I'm looking at an addiction, that's really what it is. You don't lose it.

Avoidance was identified as having an important role to play in procrastinating behaviors. Even though avoidance behaviors were frequently used to decrease anxiety, they contributed to a negative perception of the self because the individual did not achieve their ultimate goal of completing the assigned task. This was repeated behavior that participants were able to identify in retrospect. In a few instances, they were able to identify these avoidance strategies while actively engaging in them. Participants talked about how they would avoid unpleasant experience through escape to those activities that reduced or relieved them from an increasing state of anxiety. Engaging in alternate activities that became all consuming and all encompassing created an illusion of control by producing a sense of personal accomplishment and temporarily a sense of relief from anxiety.

The avoidance strategies took various forms, both subtle and obvious. Engaging in activities that would ordinarily promote on-task behaviors, such as organizational tasks or updating a calendar were often used as diversions in themselves.

Participants engaged in a variety of strategies to avoid completion of the initial task which some identified as being comparable to an addiction, while fully intending to complete it. The mini-tasks that were engaged in or strategies that were utilized created a sense of feeling good in the moment. The experience of anxiety was described as being so uncomfortable that anything that could be done to relieve that state would be better. In their descriptions they talked of moving from pain to pleasure. The degree of intolerance of feelings of anxiety often seemed very dramatic. Overall, avoidance appeared to be utilized to reduce anxiety.

Diversions functioned in a manner similar to the rescuing cavalry, arriving in the nick of time to redirect individual focus toward altogether unrelated pursuits. Such escape occurred without much sense of conscious choice and long-term consequence or while clearly aware of better judgments. Thus diversional activities emerged as points existing upon an awareness continuum of conscious choice. They involved, by differing degrees, either impulsive and non-reflective actions or more willful or deliberate behaviors.

The diversions typically involving rapid-fire behavioral actions over short-term intervals appeared to cluster in occurrence, functioning as comfort to the participants.

Inevitably characterized as happening suddenly or slowly, automatically and subtly, the participants noted such activities as occurring without much awareness or planning. Their value appeared predicated upon their immediate impacts, making the participants feel better quickly and bolstering low self-efficacy.

Expectations

Perfectionism

Fear of inadequacy of various degrees was identified as an important element that contributed towards perfectionism. Both internal and external expectations of performance were identified as problematic.

> A woman... said to me, "There's something I need to tell you about yourself ... I need to tell you this, your life depends on it. Everything worth doing is not worth doing well." And it sort of shocked me. I laughed when she first said it, and it sort of shocked me. But it is true. So the procrastination in, in part, is tattooed on my chest. It's not just something that I carry. This thing about "It's got to be done well" is so deep. It's so deep, and it's so important.

> As I watched another colleague... I think, "Idiot! Why don't you do this? You could do the same thing! Get the damn thing done! It doesn't have to be a Pulitzer Prize level." But I have conflict within myself. And I have great difficulty doing this because I am trying to compromise a value that I'm having difficulty compromising.

> It's associated with perfectionism ... the fear of not being enough, not doing well enough, not knowing enough, not being well enough prepared. It's all part of that constellation of, "I'm not going to be able to perform as well as I should, or, I'll be found lacking by someone, probably Mom or Dad".

> I think for me the need to be perfectionistic, that really hits home for me. I don't want to be the kind of person that just puts down any old information just to have them done. I want to put something really meaningful down, and so I avoid and avoid and avoid and eventually I end up putting down crap. That ends of being sometimes the last resort.

> I want to write what I'm really doing. And that gets me into all kinds of things like being perfectionistic and being very exact and really wanting to say something that's honest and truthful instead of playing the bullshit game and being a phony and writing three sentences which I often see my colleagues writing. And I can't live with myself letting that happen.

Desire to be different

Being different from the average person was an important factor that was reported by several of the participants. As with the previous section, the fear of being average appeared to contribute to hinderance of performance or to successful performance. In addition, the need to be able to set and meet internal standards was identified.

> Part of it I think is my struggle and it's misguided gift, or twisted whatever ... is to find my own time. To find my own way. To find, to keep finding that trueness to say, "Oh, this is it. This is it now." It's some part of being told what to do ... some part of it is about trying to find my way through it and my own self in it.

> It's like I don't want to be average. I want to be better than that. And I think going much deeper with that is the fear that I'm really not okay. I'm not great and lovable and all those things. And so I, like the urge to always prove that I'm worthwhile, that I'm not just average or, maybe less than. I feel like I have to show it in ways like paperwork kinds of things, work-related things, relationships ... I did the same, same perfectionistic kind of things with school ... I started my master's three times ... and feeling like I'm maybe on the inside, average in, in area too ... in an effort not to have to face it I kept putting it off.

Standards/Ideals

Overall, internal expectations of performance or personal standards did not meet, but rather exceeded external standards of performance. Having a high internal standard or ideal was identified as a common characteristic.

> Trying to deal with expectations, priorities… I experience all that as pressure, pressure to perform at a certain level. And probably for me I set that level, that standard too high. I don't, I'm not willing to let myself slide much in too many areas. Like I can't even see it another way…So there's some internal standard that sort of sets itself running automatically. I think my standards are too high.

> I would like to see my own internal standards relax (sigh) throughout my life ... as I stop to think about this, there's so many issues that start popping up about expectations. About why I'm doing what I'm doing, fitting so many things in. Um, I'm just so overly responsible ... but just to be able to relax my standards all the way around and let things be more the way they're going to be without me trying to orchestrate or ...

> This has been said to me on several occasions, "You tend to be very judgmental because you expect everything and everybody to meet your very high standards." I guess maybe I feel that I can meet those standards, but it's a great deal of effort and work.
>
> It's almost like what I was doing is like laughing at myself. "See, here it is again, another way in which you're not good enough." Yeah. Isn't that interesting (quiet voice). Always critical, always critical, that's about what it feels like ...
>
> I would like to be able to be free of having that fear about doing it the right way, doing the right thing and have confidence that whether it's right or wrong, whoever has to make that judgment, that at least I did something, at least I acted ... and get rid of that critical voice that says, "You jerk, are you doing the right thing?"
>
> I have a voice that will come out almost like ... like my conscious, you know, and say, "You're doing it again." This is, this is you know, you're not getting it done, and she's going to chew you out. She's going to get really pissed off you know. And, you know, why do you want to do that to yourself? Why do you want to get into such an uncomfortable situation where you feel very embarrassed, very uncomfortable, very ashamed?

All participants spoke of holding high and rigid performance expectations and standards that impact their ability to address a task. Throughout the interviews, numerous statements were made regarding difficulties in reducing and/or relaxing these internal standards. All participants acknowledged varying degrees of awareness that their perfectionistic expectations and critically high performance standards contributed significantly to formidable pressures and delays and to each measuring him or herself as "inadequate". While such realizations proved common, acting upon them proved another matter. The participants just seemed unable to reduce these unrealistically high and rigid standards to more reasonable levels. The internal standards for personal performance did not necessarily match the perceived level of external standards. All participants appeared to experience a sense of self-doubt about their ability to perform adequately. In addition, they often expressed a desire to make a special contribution through performing at a higher standard than may have been required for successful completion of the task.

Emotion

Emotions and their accompanying physical symptoms played a central role in the participants' experience of chronic procrastination. Emotion is a complex set of interactions among psychological and physiological systems in the individual that generates cognitive processes and behavioral responses. Participants described a complicated set of emotional reactions in conjunction with their procrastination that frequently immobilized them from completing the task.

Ambivalence

Participants indicated that they felt a push and pull between competing emotions, thoughts and needs when attempting to complete tasks. Some emotions were experienced as bodily sensations while others were predominantly experienced as competing thoughts.

> If I take a moment now, I'll know I'm procrastinating. But before that moment, I'll be in it already, and if I don't reflect on it, I'll be in it but not know I'm in it ... I'm being me but not me. The me and the not me. That's probably part of what I'm talking about. The it. The it-ness that I experience, allowing this procrastination to filter in.

> I was thinking that even when I'm writing some things on the list, I feel a kind of kickback inside. It's a body sensation. Some part of me that says, "Do not commit that to paper." It's like a warning: "This is a pitfall. If you commit this to paper you have condemned yourself to some extent." So, the part of me that wants to be kind to me sees myself writing it and is somewhat cautious. So there is that, that body sensation and that voice that says, "Don't."

> Because of what we're doing now there with the bureaucracy and the forms and the reports and all of this stuff is that most of the time while I'm trying to do my work I'm struggling against the feeling of anxiety, frustration, some sort of fatigue, depression, anger, resentment, fear, some sort of thing that feels like a negative kind of experience ... or that I'm doing what I have to do. I don't really want to do it. So the whole time I'm trying to do it I'm also at that exact same time struggling with one of those feelings ... it's like a constant dilemma, conflict dealing with two things at once.

> It's laborious living; it's a labor to stay alive, to stay functioning. "To be driven," I've written down, "while I'm absolutely still." It's to have two things happening in one body at the same time ... like being on the edge of a cliff and being beaten for not going

> forward. But it's to hold that kind of tension, where the pain is too much in the amount and the terror is too much on the next step.

Anger

Anger was an experience that was identified as occurring because of the relentless nature of procrastination. Additionally, some participants found it difficult to adapt to external pressures, the result of which was anger. Anger was expressed in varying degrees as constant irritation to intense rage. Anger was experienced both externally toward others and internally toward the self.

> Feelings welled up in me. A feeling of rage. About all the times there is no vacation. There is no vacation with procrastination. Part of me is angry that I'm not able to go on a vacation ... I try to remember ... "When I did go on a vacation?" When was my life less complex and so ordered so that when I went on vacation, I went on vacation? And then I felt like a 15 year-old or even younger when, ah, there was a glow about me. And I'd say, "Oh, I'm going on vacation." That isn't the way it's felt in years and years and years ... it's been about the burden of many things to do ... just too many things.

> I'm resenting the fact that I'm not able to call the shots in the manner that I would like to ... I don't like giving up control. I want it on my terms and how I want to do it. Which may never be when, you know, like I don't know in a sense when I would determine the time was right for me to do this on my own terms, if ever.

Anxiety

All participants experienced a wide variety of anxiety-related symptoms which caused a heightened sense of discomfort that impeded their performance. Beginning to engage in the task appeared to trigger anxiety responses that were alleviated by engaging in any type of conscious or unconscious avoidance strategies. Some participants related their experiences of anxiety with a sense of despair.

> I would have the intention of doing the task ... and as soon as the intention took on reality I would begin to feel anxious inside my body.

It's kind of a little like anxious feeling, stomach kind of, kind of quivery. It's just real mild because it's like you're shut down. But then underneath that there's this like kind of sick, quivery kind of, where you want to hide almost, you know? Fear.

I think of it like a shadow. Oh, it's all about you, and it's there, and it's part of the human condition. I don't want to be plagued with it. I don't want to be trapped and bound and beaten and all these things I become with it. This is my precious life with me now more every day and this is it.

I can't sleep ... I can't sleep at night. I wake up with anxiety attacks. I wake up every hour or something with my heart beating and terror ...I mean I'm not getting it done. I'm too tired to do it. I, I'm not going to do it right. Ah, and it's just so much because it keeps building up. I keep letting it build up. And then there's just so much it seems impossible.

When I'm about to do paperwork...anxiety fills up...stress…I push them into the future and then the future, it makes it worse. I mean it's a spiral. A downward spiral.

The fear, the anxiety, and then for pleasure you have to get away from that feeling. And then when I'm there (away) and I'm enjoying myself, I can forget about it for the minute.

Physical Symptoms

All participants reported a variety of physical symptoms that accompanied their engagement and avoidance with respect to task completion. Perceived aversive physical symptoms were associated with engaging in or thinking about engaging in the task and a perceived relief of physical symptoms was experienced when disengaging from the task.

It sort of feels like three hamsters running on an exercise thing in the middle of my stomach going as fast as they can. At other times I've had these relatively brief experiences, where I've had this feeling in my feet. And it was incredibly intense ...it was like the urge to run. But it really wasn't. It was like I wanted to, I had wanted to move my feet. It wasn't a tickling. But there was real intense, ah, agitation right sort of in the centre of my sole.

It wakes you up at night. Do you wake up at night? I wake up at night. Heart palpitations, feel like I can't breathe...

It's like a tightness in my breathing ... in my throat. And also it's in my chest ... and then my heart starts to pound. I can just feel it. Like there's ... "I'm going to write..." Boom! And I can start feeling the conflict with the progress notes.

My breathing changes completely ... I'm breathing up here (upper body). It's very short ... almost hyperventilating. And I get all the other things too, the sweaty palms, the fast heartbeat ... A lot of it goes in my gut too. I feel, all of a sudden I'll feel this sort of churning-like feeling in my gut ...

I'm aware of my back and neck. It's strained. I'm aware of a belt like pressure across my chest. I'm aware of an aching all of the time, and in the back and the lower part of my jaw and mouth. It's really present to me. My mouth is present to me, and it's heavy.

There's a fuzziness and a fogginess in my head. That's where I experience cloudiness. There's also a tension associated with it, which I feel in my chest.

I know when I read I have to consciously relax myself. Otherwise, I start getting tense ... so I really don't read a lot. I don't read very much. I listen to things.

Sometimes I pace. I'll pace back and forth or go in big circles ...It's a way to let it out. It's like, like the steam building up, and I have to have an outlet for it. You know, like a safety value, that's what the pacing is for me. I have all of this steam being built up with my anxious feelings, and I need a safety valve, and my pacing helps me do that.

Fear

The fear of failure was identified as well as a fear of being incapable of completing the designated task.

I let it get to the point of getting really, where I procrastinated seriously. Then there'll be more and more of the depressed kind of shutdown stuff. And this fear and "Oh my God I can't do it" kind of stuff. And then I still will rescue myself, rescue myself by "Okay, you'll do it tomorrow." And then frequently I'll wake up in the morning with fear. Afraid to go to work because of what I'll have to face there. And I don't want to deal with. But it's, I get to wake up (finger snap) and feel fear.

There are some experiences I've had where fear, the fear of failure has triggered the anxiety very, very clearly and when that happens it, it puts me in a spiral of this frightened anxious person who doesn't enjoy life. That seems to shut things out. That lives in a little narrow tunnel, closing things off.

Guilt

After engaging in an avoidance strategy to reduce anxiety levels, upon reflection of what was not completed, participants related feeling guilty. The guilt appeared to be pervasive and unending as the participants felt they were never engaging in the right task at the right time.

> I feel myself getting real irritated and upset and kind of emotional, like um. moody. Moody is probably a good word. But I find myself, you know, if I get wrapped up in what I'm doing, it's fine. But if I think about what I had planned for that day and that I'm not doing that, then I find in myself that I'm real edgy ...that's where the guilt comes in.

> And I'll feel guilty. My faculty advisor is going to spank me for this lateness. He's never spanked me.

> As the night went on, I knew I had to get this done, the reading ...so I started feeling edgy. I was watching a movie, and I started feeling guilty that I wasn't, you know…

> Friends would say, "Let's go downtown" or "Let's go out for some food" or something like that. And "Sure, let's go!" And I would never initiate that kind of stuff. But I was always dying to hear the invitation. I felt too guilty to take myself away. But if someone else said it, it was always time for a break.

Despair

One of the long-term implications of dealing with chronic procrastination was a sense of futility that participants experienced on a daily basis in varying degrees.

> But there have been so many times ...that I procrastinated so much, and it built up to such an enormous burden that the feeling was almost, I don't know what the feeling is. It's not quite like fear. It's not like… it's somewhere like depressing. It's like a huge burden just compressing you, pushing you down. It's a depression. There can be some anxiety to it different moments ...I have felt very, very, bad.

> It seems like you're in this hole. And how am I going to get out of it? There's no way out ...I can't find a way out. And I'm not even aware that I'm in it, sort of ...

> Somehow I feel really sad ... like in the space, it's only me and I'm, ah, and this is like me protecting myself, sort of. And I need to protect myself ... [from] maybe the truth about me. Because by putting it off, I can postpone what to me seems inevitable. And that's the truth that I'm not really okay.

> It can get worse and worse. You get this big burden that keeps getting bigger and bigger. And the bigger it gets the less you feel like doing it, but the more ...you know ...you better do it. Otherwise, it's going to get even bigger and then somebody's gonna see it, and then they're gonna start criticizing you for it and threatening and ...

> So, even if I might be thinking something more positive, productive or whatever, if I'm in that state there's no energy to start with. So it's like an extreme struggle. It's not just a little fatigue or a little burden or anxiety or frustration. It's struggling against almost the sense of having absolutely no energy ... struggling to produce something with no internal resources ... long time before the energy starts coming back.

> Everything is very constricted and my world seems very narrow. I don't see what's around me. You know the experience of driving from point A to point B without ever having experienced what was happens there. And you know I miss the beauty of the world around me totally. My world just seems very, very small, very constricted.

A number of participant descriptions had a specific reference. While some individuals spoke of inner and outer experiences when finding themselves in procrastination circumstances, all remarked about how they felt constricted or sought distance to protect themselves against their aversive reactions. Each participant appeared to follow an idiosyncratic pattern of behavior to attempt to gain relief from this discomfort. Many of the ways of distancing at times seemed to occur without consideration of consequences while at other times with acknowledgment of potential consequences. Being surprised on occasion with the realization that they were procrastinating without awareness of doing so, many remarked on the subtlety of sudden and totally enveloping procrastination.

Participants reported experiencing an overriding variety of anxiety-related symptoms. They were aware of falling back into familiar avoidance patterns while facing the challenge of getting tasks underway. Good intentions often collapsed amidst rapidly escalating aversive experiences. Overall, the most frequently reported emotion for participants was anxiety.

The participants expressed awareness of movement in their experiences of procrastination, noting themselves as approaching work slowly and reluctantly, often only after being forced by deadlines and their consequences. Without such external pressures, individual movements toward and with work appeared more fitful, fragmented, erratic and agitated. Consistently participants spoke of moving away from anxiety-arousing experiences, and of moving toward other pursuits promising relief and optimism, however temporary.

The physical reactions described are suggestive of sympathetic nervous system involvement of a fight or flight variety. These reactions appear to be predictable and consistent response patterns for these individuals. The unremitting constancy and impact of physical reactions over time appear linked to foreboding about future or anticipated performance. These secondary aversive experiences may stem as much from projective fantasies as from direct performance risk and helplessness, powerlessness and confusion. Related in urgent, pressured or hushed tones, the subjective nature of personal disclosing was accompanied by shifts in facial expression, vocal tone, and postural contortions.

The participants acknowledged having intense desires to escape aversive affect. Initial engagement proved to be the occasions of highest distractibility and impulsivity. In these early movements away from performance associated activity, participants left behind commitments and task focus. Ultimately the need to avoid the negative affect took precedence over the need to complete the required task.

Interpersonal Consequences

Social Distress

Participants indicated that procrastination had an aversive impact on their ability to establish and maintain successful interactions with others. Each indicated that they perceived a distance between themselves and others that at times caused sadness and discomfort.

> I'm always feeling behind and trying to catch up that limited amount of time I've had to share with people. That is such a painful awareness for me. And it has been for quite some time, dealing with this constant being behind and catch up, behind, catch up, put it off, make it up, put it off, make it up. I have had so little time to go out and create or nurture the kinds of relationships that I value that it's, uh, it's really a great loss.
>
> If you were to meet me on the street and say, "Hi, how are you doing?" I wouldn't say, "Ah pretty good." You already would, either I would have pushed myself away or you would have been pushed, or something would have happened to the distance between us. I don't know if I would have warned you. I wouldn't have wanted to hand you the heaviness. But I might have wanted to put something between us. So that you didn't come closer, so that more of it would have been revealed.
>
> I have a granddaughter. She would run across the room. I would be, there's something about this procrastination, and the heaviness of how I carry it and how I know it, that my, my, ah, reaching out for her I wouldn't be totally in my body. Or I'd be in my body and some of my burden. So that I'm talking about the crime of it...insidious crap of it.
>
> I know that, ah, I'm not being, I'm not valuing, ah, my agreements or relationships with my spouse in particular when I'm doing that procrastinating. I'm betraying her. It's a feeling of betrayal. I betray myself and her when I'm in this position...it's a sin that I'm wasting my beloved's time, you know, and energy.
>
> I didn't want to do it. It felt like the job was in charge of me instead of me being in charge of what I was doing. People were just harraging me, and I didn't have time to do it how I wanted to do it.
>
> I'm very undisciplined in many ways. I can discipline myself with the things I want to... but now people are saying, "You've got to turn in written reports." And I don't like anyone telling me what to do.

Relational Difficulties

Chronic procrastination had a profound impact on relationships. While at times, the procrastinating behaviors facilitated engagement with like-minded others, at other times it interfered with long-term relationships. The interference occurred in various ways in different settings.

My procrastination is, is sometimes my way of saying, "Fuck you. I'm not doing what you want me to do or what society expects me to do because I am my own free individual. I'm going to prove it to you. No matter what you do to me, I will still do it the way I want to do it."

I speak from behind a veil. And others feel the distances even in the simplest social interactions. That, I'm not all the way here.

I'm sure procrastination manifests itself in moodiness...partly because of that irritability maybe. I may be short on people. I think the internal preoccupation also tends for me to shut things out, you know? Someone may say something to me, and I may not even respond to it cause I won't hear it. So that's how reversed it is from the other orientation where I'm real receptive to the outside. It's almost as if I, I miss big pieces that are coming in.

I would set up arbitrary end points for myself and work toward those. And if I wasn't there I'd simply change it, which created some problems...financial problems, my wife would keep getting upset about. "But you said you were going to finish it last year, and no." So that's part of the external pressure.

Sometimes an inattentiveness can happen, where you're preoccupied with thinking about what you're supposed to be doing, okay, and so you become inattentive.

It's very agonizing you know...because it's not fair. It just isn't fair. It isn't her issue. She's not procrastinating, and she feels as helpless as I do. I mean, you know, what is she going to tell me? She can't just order me to do it. She knows chewing me out doesn't work...and it's puzzling and difficult for her to understand...I'm oftentimes in the doghouse and as bewildered as my wife or anyone else regarding why I haven't done it on time again.

I feel pretty weak when it comes to making decisions...Some people ask me and I say, "That sounds great. Yes. Yes." I don't think about those things I need to do ...How could I possibly say, "No, I have to do this dreadful homework.

The people who work with me, who respected me and thought a great deal of me and who didn't understand much about procrastination, became very critical and distrusted me. I mean they began to generalize it out and began to think of me as a distrustful person in general. Similar to an alcoholic...I was a liability. I had become a liability is what occurred in my professional life when this year was happening...if they were to meet with me again now, even though it's been 10 to 12 years since that happened, they would still have a taste of that in their mouths. They would still look...at me like, "There goes that (hits table hard) distrustful person. He's saying he's doing something he didn't do." Or, "That irrational person, why would he want to do that to himself?"

Participants disclosed that extensive procrastination had a dramatic effect on interpersonal relationships regardless of occupation, gender, age or personality differences. Considerable differences existed among experiences, with some disclosing chronic relational difficulties while others noted more acute social distress. Wide ranging relational issues were mentioned, involving the concerns of generalized social withdrawal and spousal stress, peer collusion and envy and authority / autonomy conflicts.

Participants generally acknowledged a sense of social withdrawal whereby the more each procrastinated, the more they felt that they withdrew from personal interactions with the exception of occasionally colluding with other like-minded procrastinators. The longer this continued, the greater the social impact appeared to become. In essence, a mounting sense of despair, heaviness, constriction and distance appeared to characterize the social interactions of these adults recurrently weighed down by pressing procrastination concerns.

Finding themselves distant and cut off from others, their interaction difficulties included spousal and peer relationships. Aware of their part in causing the escalating interpersonal tensions, participants remained unaware of themselves as having boundary issues or the requisite wills and means to effect positive change. Participants somewhat begrudgingly evidenced envy toward the consistent work styles of non-procrastinating peers, and appeared prone toward colluding with like-minded others, rather than modeling after non-procrastinators. A defensive, critical posturing toward such "doers" appeared common with work or school.

Finally, impaired interpersonal patterns occurred relative to participant relationships with authority figures. Each adult described long-standing and pronounced tensions toward authorities in school or at work. Participants generally acknowledged attitudes of guilt or resentment and often envisioned themselves either as failing to measure up to external standards or pressures or resenting authority figures imposing restrictions on them.

Reflective Portraits

In the following section, two reflective portraits are presented. While having obvious points of contrast, each exemplifies common characteristics. Together they suggest the behavioural rhythms, rituals, and experiential insights, awareness and understanding of procrastinating adults.

Through the Looking Glass – The Author's Experience

The first portrait is that of the author, therefore, presented in the first person. The portrait is intended to describe my daily struggle to move beyond the static inability to engage in essential activity.

With my initial early morning bathing and dressing routine completed, I begin to clear off and prepare the dinner table for my day's work. Today, like so many other days before, I hope to realize progress on my dissertation.

I move very deliberately at first, gathering together and then placing upon the table relevant materials such as yellow legal writing pads, pencils, pens, a copy or two of previous paper drafts and a couple of helpful articles and resource textbooks. Next, after positioning these items into their proper places, I begin to jot down an outline, mechanically organizing my work into such component parts as introduction, biographical connections, etc. Completing this, I stop just before confronting more challenging concerns. Experiencing some internal conflict / struggle, I realize that I do not really want to be doing any of this now while I also recognize my obligation toward progressing in this academic program that is costing me a fortune.

Promising myself that I will return in a few minutes, my internal conflict / struggle recedes as I push my chair away from the table, reach for the nearest telephone and make a call which could well have waited until later. With that call and another one or two out of the way, I decide to walk into the kitchen and start some coffee to get my mind working and energy level rising. Noting the wall clock ticking while the coffee perks, I also gather some snacks from the cupboards and refrigerator.

Several minutes later, fridge closed, cupboard items and shelves straightened and snacks arranged gracefully on the tray I'm carrying to the table, I return to the work left waiting. Lifting the proposed outline off the table, I browse its contents between bites and nibbles. Judging the outline as okay but lacking relevancy to my own objectives, I spend a bit of time revamping various parts without any real focus.

Without warning, the postal carrier comes, signaling another momentary stoppage as I run out to check on this day's news. More time elapses as I open and painstakingly review every mail item, regardless of merit. Decisions follow, again deliberately made as to what will be tossed, what clipped and stashed, and what to be kept and saved. Some mail ends up near my car keys - destined for the glove compartment box and grocery store. Other bits and pieces fan out in similar order. Outgoing or staying, all mail is dispatched with attention. Depositing some items in the garbage near the basement door, I suddenly realize the benefits of doing a quick load of laundry while I am writing my paper. Going down to the basement, I throw in a load of clothes. About to go back upstairs, a book that I read years ago catches my eye. Seating myself with it on the basement steps, I think to myself, "I can do the laundry while I'm doing the other work, and if I just sit on the steps for a few more minutes looking through this book, I'll be through the wash cycle and not have to run down again." As soon as the cycle stops washing, I unload the wet clothes into the dryer. Realizing some rayons are among the clothes, I remove them for air drying. This takes me a bit longer than I expected. Hanging the rayons means going upstairs since the basement clothes rod collapsed some weeks earlier. Wanting to hurry, I run upstairs with these washed items. Going to a closet and retrieving some wire hangers, I put the wet articles over the tub's railing.

While I am returning to the dinner table, the phone rings. Although an answering machine minimizes its disturbance, I listen carefully to the incoming call. Proving to be someone I want to speak with, I interrupt my pre-recorded message. Fully enjoying myself, it's another 20 minutes before I finally hang up. Back at the table, my coffee is cold. Heating up another mug, I'm surprised by the time, a half-day gone. Where?

Still needing to shop for food and knowing that my wife will leave work starving, I decide to drive over to the grocery store, which is very close, and grab some fixings for an easy supper. About out of the door, I remember a shirt that needs dry-cleaning, along with several of my wife's items. Scooping these up, I throw them into the back of my car and head for the store, dropping them off on the way. Once at the market, I pick up a local newspaper. In no time at all I'm back home again, squaring away my foodstuffs and saving the newspaper until later when there's time to relax.

Again at the table, I make another effort at writing. Believing I should at least get one section done, I recall several broken appointments with my core faculty member concerning this work. Imagining her as ready to say, "Go find some other idiot", I force myself to the task before me. Briefly writing, perhaps as much as a few paragraphs, I then think it best to let it sit a bit, re-reading it later when I'm better able to find and correct parts that should be changed and modified. Leaving my writing alone for the time being, I decide to read the newspaper I purchased earlier.

At 3:30 PM, finished with my reading, I look up and out the window. Noticing the grass, I realize that it really should be watered. Running outside, I position the hose and sprinkler so the yard gets a good soaking. Walking back into the house, I begin to prepare a salad for dinner, scrub the potatoes, and season the pork chops. With dinner ready to be popped into the oven, it's now about 4:45 PM. My wife finishes work in 45 minutes. Some 7 or 8 minutes away and without a car of her own, I decide to spare her the bus ride back home. Arriving a bit early, I discover my wife is not quite ready, and I sit alone, waiting impatiently for her to finish. Then we head home to dinner together. While the food cooks, I clear the table of all school related materials, noting, "I can't keep my crap all over the table and enjoy the meal too".

Shoving all my materials aside, the place mats are brought out and the table set. Serving the meal and eating then gives way to clearing off dishes and cleaning up. Next, my wife and I straighten up the kitchen. Then I rearrange my schoolwork. Sitting down, I read my earlier efforts. Judging them as awful, I crumple them up and decide to start over. Writing another two or three new paragraphs, I then question whether or not to let this work sit until tomorrow. Noting it's already time for the 7 o'clock news, I choose to see what's going on with the world over this stuff that I really don't care to be doing right now anyway. While watching the news, I begin to get worried, and I decide to return to the table and read some more. Jotting down some brief notes, I even attempt to write again.

Admonishing myself for paying tuition every year, every semester, for this, "this dissertation I'm supposed to be doing", I demand that I get with it! I then decide that I need to read some more instead of writing. But at this point my wife happens by, inquiring about one thing or another, presenting an interruption. By now feeling quite angry and frustrated, realizing I have achieved "zilch" with my studies, I'm left painfully aware of other work waiting. Having to get up early the next morning to make it to work on time, I put away my materials with the words, "I will get to this next week". Beginning work on a report needed for my hospital position, I recognize that my salary pays the bills and begin writing up the report for work.

Just underway, I note that it's now 11:00 PM and think to myself, "Who needs all of this?" Daydreaming about accepting myself as not graduating or completing this program of study, I find myself angry all over again. Criticizing my own shortsightedness, I say to myself, "What kind of rationalization is that? You've invested all kinds of time. You've invested all kinds of money and you just can't quit." Continuing to feel angry, I take a walk with my dog, rationalizing that it is good for me to be outdoors and then return home to get ready for bed and go to sleep. The next day I begin the process all over again.

A Participant's Experience

This presentation brings the reader into closer contact with the views of a single participant. Developed as a clear, vivid and detailed description of his own experiences, this reflective portrait notes many of the collective and familiar features of procrastination. Throughout this narrated journey of experienced awareness and understandings, the quoted material represents actual descriptions expressed during our interview.

Envisioning his own procrastination as fundamentally involving perfectionistic expectations, he understands it as something stemming from fear. "It's the fear of not being enough," he notes, "not doing well enough, not knowing enough, not being well enough prepared. It's all part of that constellation you know, I'm not going to be able to perform as well as I should, or I'll be found lacking by someone...". These views and others crystallize into performance dreads. Anxious, avoidant, and pessimistic before even beginning, he notes that time has an elastic presence under such circumstances.

In the beginning time is perceived as something plentiful, as something more than enough relative to performance needs. His habitually delayed beginnings seem inconsequential, occurring regularly when there is plenty of time to waste. These wide and expansive initial time periods prove instances when it isn't all that important that he do it now. As time passes, however, a heightened pressure toward starting is triggered. More anxious now, he notes that even with tightening time constraints he still manages to push the work aside. By becoming active with other pursuits, there's little or no time left to think about it. And by avoiding making lists or losing them when they are prepared, he remains unaware of deadlines approaching.

Much closer to the performance due date, he oftentimes experiences a shocking realization that there's much less time to get the work completed. Performance pressures at this latter date are more constant and unforgiving. Approaching this critical point, time suddenly looms large. No longer able to waste or lose time, its preciousness seems to mobilize his efficiency, to the extent that he manages to get a lot done in a short period of time. Deadline dependent, his decision to move full speed ahead appears generated by the time remaining to completion. Once it reaches that critical point of no slack, he goes after it with purposefulness replacing caution. Previously fitful, indecisive, and avoidant actions are replaced with more stable, task-committed and focused efforts. Aware of probable instances when this did not prove the case, he noted that those end point circumstances or deadlines probably were not fixed but could still slide. During other instances of more self-determined and directed performance, where deadlines were arbitrarily established, he noted that if the deadline wasn't there he'd simply change the deadline.

He ends this awareness of time's elasticity on another note, implying it also serves a self-handicapping ideal image protecting function. After all, when he finally decides to apply himself, there's far less time to perform perfectly. The implication here is that had he begun on time, there would have been little or no excuse for less than outstanding results.

Bodily symptoms related to the aforementioned fears also register throughout his experiences of procrastination. Noting the presence of chest tension associated with performance demands, he acknowledges it, and the fear escalates, as time passes, off and on he becomes more anxious, agitated and confused, until shock sets in with the realization that time has nearly run out. When others are involved in noticing his lateness, additional guilt, embarrassment and shame occur.

Once reaching that critical point of demanding action, however, a shift is introduced where he notes, "Physically I feel, mobilized. I feel like my internal energy and my mental energy is at that point focused. It's really like ... going into battle ... like I'm strapping on my armor ... I'm committed to getting this done."

Task initiation is originally inhibited by negative anticipation. "I don't want to get into it because if I get into it, then I'm gonna find out right away how difficult it is, how much more I have to do. How impossible it will be." At this point, escape to other more present activity is likely. "There's no question in my mind that's it. Got too much energy, use it … so that will draw me away." Once the task is begun, however, having reached the critical point of external demand, action and focus become more task directed. "Then what happens is I move into it whatever the task is, whatever I'm supposed to do. And it's always easier than I had feared it was going to be."

Task orientation is influenced by affective state related to time. Initially, time seems plentiful and open, and affective diversion is acceptable. "There is a lot that I can do. I can wander out over this terrain, you know, in any direction and often do. I'll dance with completing a number of different things ... meander ... and I think once the process continues … perhaps this is when the dancing gets more frantic, as I realize there's a deadline approaching, then the time space narrows down. And at some point, I think around this critical juncture ... there's a path that's very clear for me. The space condenses, and I can see the path to completion." As deadlines approach, diversion becomes more difficult, ultimately yielding to focus on the task.

Emerging as self-image related structures, diversions suggested progress, effectiveness, control and ability, while excusing procrastination. Clustered during early and midpoint periods, diversions could prove to be either necessary tasks or unnecessary distractions, deliberately decided or impulsively pursued. He noted that once engrossed in one or another of the constant diversions, he would be too occupied to get started on the primary task, even in some cases losing track of it altogether. When a diversion was deliberately engaged, he would rationalize it with other tasks "that have to be done sooner because ... this is a multi-task system with deadlines on all of these." Thus, he could claim a need to complete his job related responsibilities in order to ensure money for house payments and expenses - putting off needed work elsewhere. These instances represented conscious decisions with his choice predicated upon the available time remaining for each task. Feeling under the gun a lot, he would be working on these tangential concerns while also realizing he really needed to spend his time on other tasks. Guilt would replace satisfaction in such instances.

Other diversions could involve emptying the dishwasher, calling acquaintances on the phone, answering correspondence. These smaller tasks would, according to him, "pop up from out of the blue." Oftentimes visibly distracting, they would draw him away from his work for brief time periods. He often discovered other things again popping up which he felt obliged to address. Overall, he noted such instances as a process of rationalizing that " ... this little thing that I'm attending to ... won't really delay me very much. And then of course there's the next little thing that, well, it's not that big of a thing to do either. Then I look up and discover that several hours have elapsed, and it's time to go to lunch. How'd that happen?

Sharing that such actions led to considerable delays, he acknowledged some positive outcomes in this pattern. Smaller tasks, after all, were more readily completed and lent a sense of accomplishment and good feeling despite delaying what really needed to be accomplished. Diversions were less prevalent after he passed the critical point on his time line when he was no longer able to grant himself the distractions that he used to trip over.

It has often appeared to him, in hindsight, that once confronting his avoidance, he had given way to last minute impulses of desire. “Even when it’s difficult, it isn’t as bad as I thought it would be. And very often, I might even say always, I experience a sadness that I didn’t give myself ... the peace of starting when I needed to. I balked myself with my fear.” He balked himself with his expectations and diversions toward painlessness as well. When he finally looked upon completion, a continuing disbelief and sadness replaced triumph. Saying quietly to himself, “That’s good,” he is left wondering how much better it would have been, or how much more pleasant if only he’d begun earlier. Wondering further about others who have the self-discipline he himself finds so late in his struggle, he remembers his spouse and her disappointment toward him and his style. Her upset words, “But you said you were going to finish it last year” ring throughout his own inner silence. The many brief moments during instances of diversions where he fleetingly recognized glimmers of worth and ability were of little or no comfort now. Aware of forfeiting responsibility for more immediate pleasures, he painfully understands himself as not using his inner resources well. And he senses he should have reached his present level of achievement ten years earlier.

Aware of himself as being like two different people, the little boy who just wants to play and not be responsible and the more mature adult who makes things happen ... who accomplishes, is responsible for his family and in his work, he finds himself wishing for change while not believing that change is possible.

Summary

For all participants involved in this study, the experience of procrastination proved a painful emotional journey, traveled throughout in lonely isolation and intense self-doubt and ending with little or no satisfaction. Initially, time is imagined as something elastic and expansive, more than enough or even too much, as something which can be ignored or forgotten without harm. "Later", "tomorrow", "next weekend" suggest participants' tendencies toward putting off immediate effort for future promise.

As time goes on, participants note time as narrowing and pressuring. Delays then carry greater consequences, such as heightened anxiety and agitation or other more intense stress reactions. As time runs down, a critical point of urgency increases toward the deadline, and diversional activities decrease. An hour wasted at this point is an hour lost. With no time left to lose, actions are more focused, performance more sustained, efficiency heightened. It is important to note that "efficiency is not always heightened".

All participants noted the presence of diversions during experiences of procrastination. Diversions emerged as protective of self-image and fostered illusions of power, control, progress, and effectiveness.

Ever vigilant toward affective arousal, mounting stress and quick exits, participants moved toward diversional activities with oftentimes breathtaking impulsivity only to later discover themselves more trapped by such escapes. For a while these distractions may anesthetize, the cost of such painlessness proves to be powerlessness. Work avoided is not work vanished but rather work postponed, only to appear again later and with more concentrated focus.

All participants expressed awareness of action and non-action in their experiences of procrastination. Emotionally driven diversions away from image-threatening performance regularly occurred, often against better judgments. Such harried and unreflected movements led to safer, less anxious activities which resulted in short range tasks. Momentarily relieved, participants later expressed frustration, guilt, shame, anger, confusion and despair toward these compulsive patterns.

Despite other individual differences, participants were aware of themselves as holding perfectionistic attitudes, practicing self-critical internal dialogues and fluctuating in their interpersonal relationships.

Regarding expectations, participants acknowledged demanding of themselves more than could be delivered. Rigid and demanding, these standards intimidate and rob individuals of more realistic expectations. Seeking relief from such circumstances, participants guard against the threat of errors, fear of criticism and scrutiny of authority figures by delaying, evading and avoiding. Consumed by security concerns, they may live convinced that the safest pathway between start and finish is the longest. The participants, choosing comfort over necessity, direct their efforts toward reducing pain and enhancing pleasure, forfeiting better judgment in favor of experiencing immediate relief.

Often self-critical and demanding, participants grow impatient and frustrated with themselves during procrastination. On edge, upset and oftentimes not wanting to reveal their burden, they will avoid or withdraw from close contact with others. On other occasions, participants shared instances when they watched enviously or despairingly as others moved predictably ahead on schedule. Noting themselves as more typically experiencing some degree of impasse due to their characteristic use of excuses, avoidance and evasions in place of organization, commitment and purposefully focused efforts, their social withdrawal was more readily understandable. Unlike the others moving forward, being on time for participants proved a dream long desired yet never quite realized. Continuing to find things to do rather than doing what needs to be done, becoming all wrapped up in tangential diversions of little or no consequence, their hurry belies their paralysis. Inconsistent, easily distracted, impulsive, neglectful of the present, undisciplined and avoidant, they lead lives promising much and delivering little.

5

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Procrastination is a behavior that may be often overlooked or dismissed in adults but for certain individuals can have serious consequences in their daily functioning. My interest in chronic procrastination springs from my own experiences with procrastination. Participants in this study proved eager to relate their life stories concerning chronic procrastination patterns as it provided them with an opportunity to discuss their difficulties with this behaviour. Many of the reportedly unique experiences with chronic procrastination appear to have universal qualities. The use of a heuristic research method facilitated self-disclosure resulting in a common pursuit of awareness and understanding of chronic procrastination patterns. By analyzing the thematic structures throughout each individual participant account, I discovered the core themes of Time, Deadlines, Avoidance, Expectations, Emotion, and Interpersonal Consequences as comprising a description of chronic procrastination experiences in adults.

Avoidance

Avoidance of aversive projects is defined in this study as activities individuals are disinclined to engage in because the projects are perceived as large, complex, difficult, or unpleasant (Thibodeau, 1996). Procrastination on aversive tasks is supported by the research literature, where individuals report being more likely to procrastinate on academic tasks. For example, Solomon and Rothblum (1984) found that aversiveness of the task accounted for 18% of the variance in academic procrastination, and Milgram, Marshevsky, and Sadeh (1995) found that students delayed most on tasks labelled unpleasant and least on those labelled pleasant. Thus, tasks rated as aversive by individuals are more likely to be postponed than those rated as pleasant or neutral.

With a task which requires a considerable amount of effort such as an essay, or studying for a major exam, the procrastinating individual might try to avoid the last minute panic by organizing a schedule to complete various parts of the task. For example, a procrastinator may plan to go to the library on Monday to find research materials; read them over on Tuesday and Wednesday; organize notes into categories on Thursday; and compile a paper over the weekend. Hence, he or she has very good intentions to avoid or counter procrastination when completing this project. At this point, time appears infinite. Common thinking for procrastinators may include a decision on Monday that there really isn't any need to spend a whole day devoted to finding articles and books in the library, so he or she decides to leave it for the next day. A week may be viewed as being plenty of time to complete the project. Although previously having planned out a week for the task, the procrastinator convinces himself or herself that he or she will still be able to accomplish it efficiently without delaying action in the later part of the week.

The previous example demonstrates a pattern in which the procrastinator often has a distorted time sense relative to the time to complete a task which allows him or her to postpone or leave the task for yet another day without fully considering the total amount of work and appropriately budgeting their time. Time initially appears infinite and limitless. Eventually, the individual realizes that the task deadline is upon them and struggles at the last minute to reach completion while simultaneously attempting to manage an overwhelming amount of anxiety. Accurately estimating the amount of time required to complete a task might not occur until he or she is in the midst of the work. By this point, it is often too late as time has narrowed, and panic and anxiety has set in. Because the deadline is acknowledged as imminent, the time distortion has become clear. The procrastinator may then seek a time extension in order to complete the task. If an extension is granted, anxiety levels decrease which delays successful completion by allowing the individual to escape and recreate the time distortion. Tasks in which a prolonged period of time is available for completion are susceptible to a similar process.

For those who do not have serious issues with procrastination, deadlines may allow the individual to mobilize, focus, and ultimately complete the task. For the individual who procrastinates, this is not the case. As the imposed deadline approaches, anxiety levels significantly increase as no time is left to engage in alternate tasks which serve to decrease anxiety levels. Panic then sets in which can lead to feelings of terror. Consistent with the results reported by Quarton (1992), the participants in this study also noted critical voices stating, "You could have done it earlier", and "Why didn't you get it in gear". Overall, avoidance was identified as playing a critical role in procrastination behavior.

Negative Evaluations

It is not only avoidance or aversion to performing a project per se that leads to procrastination, but also the frequent arousal of participants' fears of negative evaluations that is aversive and leads to delay. Thus projects rated as more aversive by participants often were more likely to be delayed because they aroused fears of negative evaluations by self and others.

A large proportion of the research on procrastination is devoted to evaluation. This topic is variously construed as *fear of failure* (e.g. Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Beery, 1975), protection of social- and self-esteem (Ferrari, 1991c) and evaluation anxiety (Clark & Hill, 1994), all of which are elements of the core themes presented here. Although several other factors are included in the core themes, the key point is that there is a preoccupation among procrastinators regarding how they will be evaluated or perceived by others. Ferrari (1991), for example, found that procrastinators were more likely to prefer tasks which afforded them the opportunity to make a favourable public impression, and concluded that "dispositional procrastination may be motivated by a desire for approval from a public audience" (p. 1237).

This deep concern with public impressions often combines with low self-efficacy and self-worth and serves to increase the delay of task performance. In this study, participants relayed doubts about their own abilities that interacted with a fear of rejection that led to delays in completing assigned tasks. There is ample evidence in the literature that procrastinators suffer from lower self-worth than non-procrastinators, including low self-esteem, self-denigration, and lower self-efficacy than non-procrastinators (Ferrari et al., 1995; Ferrari, 1991; Beswick, Rothblum, & Mann, 1988).

Low self-efficacy among procrastinators suggests another possible reason for greater procrastination on aversive projects. The relationship of project aversiveness to evaluation anxiety may operate in the opposite direction, with fears of negative evaluation affecting the perception of project difficulty and complexity. In fact, Lay (1987) did find that procrastinators tended to perceive tasks as more difficult and stressful than non-procrastinators. Thus, consistent with the results obtained in the current study, individuals who doubt their own abilities may be more likely to evaluate a task as aversive than individuals who are more confident, and, therefore, individuals who doubt their abilities are more likely to delay performing a task.

Fear of negative evaluation by self or others is a common characteristic in the theme of task avoidance for every participant in the present study, although for some the link is more obvious than for others. Fear of negative evaluation can affect procrastination in two major ways. First, it can trigger project delay by increasing anxiety and therefore project aversiveness. Second, it can trigger project *engagement* by elevating anxiety. These seemingly contradictory findings are best illustrated by the common pattern of long task delay followed by frantic last-minute efforts to meet a deadline. It appears that when evaluation is still relatively far in the future, the anxiety associated with it often results in procrastination. However, as the evaluation date approaches, anxiety is increased to such a high level that it can no longer be pushed aside by using typical distractions or excuses. Thus, the anxiety reported in this data often served a motivational function for participants who experienced it. Although this pattern is not evident among all participants, it was often the fear of being negatively evaluated which served as the ultimate catalyst for action, preventing several of the participants from actually missing externally-imposed deadlines. Eventually, evaluation apprehension appeared to override project aversiveness, and the project was begun.

Another important facet of evaluation is the consequences, or more accurately the lack of consequences, resulting from project delay. Although participants generally reported feelings of subjective concern for their procrastination behaviour, most claimed to be somewhat satisfied with their level of achievement. It is difficult to know whether, to what extent, and for whom this is true. Several of the participants are high achievers. Thus it is possible that "getting away with it" is acting as a type of positive reinforcement for project delay.

Evaluation and project aversiveness appear to be closely interrelated for the participants who were interviewed. In addition, anxiety seemed to play a role in regulating the perception of project aversiveness in that someone with high anxiety may have a tendency to perceive certain situations or projects as more aversive/evaluative than someone with low anxiety. Alternatively, high evaluative / aversive contexts are likely to increase anxiety (Thibodeau, 1996).

Consistent with the findings of Thibodeau (1996), the results obtained in this study indicate that a procrastinating individual's internal state, defined as the tendency of making choices concerning task delay based upon their current mood or emotional state, impacted the perception of project aversiveness and evaluation. Participants frequently checked their internal state prior to deciding to engage in a project or task and appeared to employ circular reasoning to reinforce their decision when engaging in an aversive task with a possible evaluative component.

Time Management and Organizational Skills

The participants reported a striking lack of organizational skill in managing their projects and tasks. Particularly notable is the fact that none regularly used common tools such as keeping a date book or time budgeting, despite their admission that procrastination was a problem for them. For some participants, the perceived inflexibility of such an approach was especially distasteful. For others, there appeared to be a lack of awareness that such strategies are available, beneficial, or necessary.

Those participants who expressed a lack of skill in time-management found themselves genuinely overburdened at times, which may have impacted their assessment of both a project's aversiveness and the desirability of encountering an evaluative situation. On the other hand, those who had strong feelings about being evaluated appeared to resist organizational techniques as a way of limiting their engagement with such encounters. Furthermore, organizational techniques often consist of projects themselves, and these projects often carry their own aversive qualities (e.g., "following a schedule just seems too rigid"), and at times these techniques appeared to be implemented as another method of delaying or putting off what needed to be completed.

The lack of organizational skills or strategies among the participants may also be related to evaluation. Because procrastinators are so preoccupied with external evaluations of their performance, they rely heavily on deadlines and time structuring imposed by other people. The over reliance on externally-imposed deadlines and the general inability to meet self-imposed deadlines may contribute to the well-known pattern of a period of procrastination followed by a frantic effort to complete the project on time (Thibodeau, 1996).

This familiar pattern is related to evaluation in a second way, in that it often constitutes a form of self-handicapping, defined by Ferrari (1991) as "[r]educing threats to social and self-esteem by actively seeking inhibitory factors that interfere with performance" (p. 246). In other words, delaying a task until no more than a suboptimal performance can be expected is a way of avoiding the possibility of a negative evaluation of one's best performance. This was most clearly expressed by one participant, who said she was "handicapping" herself by not "putting everything on the line". It was also inferred from unrealistic goals of another participant and from the overburdened schedule of a third participant. Echoing this theme, several of the participants stated that they felt certain they could improve if it weren't for their procrastination.

Anxiety and Concentration

An aspect of participants' procrastination that may be related to anxiety is concentration. Several participants reported problems remaining focused on a task, concentrating, and problems with attention. Two participants, for example, felt they had little control over where their 'brains' went at times, and concentration problems were central for both of them. For one participant, 'boredom' made it difficult to stay at any one task for an extended period of time, even an enjoyable task such as reading. Another participant reported she was particularly prone to distractions when she was working. Finally, for another participant, concentration was related to being in the mood to work. If he found himself unable to concentrate on a project, he concluded he was not in the right mood for working and returned to it at a later time.

Those participants who had difficulty with concentration found that they are often unable to do sustained work at one task for a long period of time (i.e., more than 30 minutes in some cases). Obviously, some projects come with requirements for such sustained work and are likely to be perceived as negative. In addition, aversive projects and/or those projects that evoke negative evaluation (by self or by others) may be projects on which it is more difficult to concentrate for sustained periods.

There may also be a link between anxiety and concentration. It may be that the connections among evaluation, project aversiveness, and concentration described above are, in fact, expressed through the psycho-physiological mechanism of anxiety.

Participants would try to sit and work for longer periods, but describe themselves as unable to do so. Therefore, rather than a straightforward and conscious assessment of project difficulty leading to decreased concentration, it is likely that apprehension about a project increases arousal / anxiety, which then impacts the ability to concentrate. In a case where the task is simply tedious, boring, or unpleasant and does not arouse anxiety, there appears to be a link between concentration and project aversiveness. These were consistent with results reported in Thibodeau (1996).

At this time, there does not appear to be any scientific research on the prevalence of concentration difficulties in procrastinators per se. Aitken (1982) and McCown (1995) have found links between impulsivity and procrastination, which may be related to concentration or ability to sustain attention. Hallowell and Ratey (1994) also suggested a twenty point diagnostic criteria for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) in adults which included chronic procrastination or trouble getting started; many projects going simultaneously; and trouble with follow-through. "Adults with ADD associate so much anxiety with beginning a task, due to their fears that they won't do it right, that they put it off and off, which, of course, only adds to the anxiety around the task. As one task is put off, another is taken up. By the end of the day, or week, or year, countless projects have been undertaken, while few have found completion" (p. 73). Research has also suggested that children with a Learning Disorder (LD) often have a co-diagnosis of ADHD, Tourette's Disorder, and / or a mood disorder. According to the DSM-IV, the most common co-diagnosis is ADHD, with 20 to 25% of learning disordered children also receiving a diagnosis of ADHD (DSM-IV, 1994).

References to both anxiety and concentration difficulties are quite prevalent in the interview data collected in the present study and suggest a potentially fruitful avenue for future research. The possibility of a link between chronic procrastination and learning disabilities is another area of investigation that appears lacking in the scientific research at this time.

Locus of Control

The research literature has produced inconclusive results in investigating the locus of control construct. Briordy (1980), Ferrari et al. (1992), and Aitken (1982) all failed to find a significant relation between procrastination and locus of control. However, Rothblum et al. (1986) found that procrastinators were more likely than non-procrastinators to attribute their success on an exam to external, unstable causes. In this study, participants all emphasized that their procrastination was a personality trait, rather than a learned behaviour. One participant especially stressed that it was his 'nature' to procrastinate. Such strong internal attributions should, according to the cognitive theory of locus of control, lead to more difficulty in overcoming the behaviour. People who believe that procrastination is an acquired habit rather than a personality trait should find they have a stronger sense of control over their project delay. Clearly, more research is needed to clarify the relationship, if any, between procrastination and the attributions of its causes by procrastinators.

One direction for future study might be the relationship between attribution and procrastination as mediated by organization. It seems reasonable to expect that people with internal attributions for their procrastination will be more likely to resist implementing time management strategies; whereas, those who believe procrastination to be a learned strategy for coping with one's projects may be more open to attempting new strategies. Individuals with strong belief structures would require cognitive behavioural strategies to challenge their beliefs that procrastination is an innate behaviour.

Chronic Procrastination Patterns

One particularly poignant finding of this study concerns the avowed inability of participants to end chronic procrastination patterns. Most participants revealed themselves as feeling helpless and self-critical against this difficulty and failing to see how they might move past procrastination's despair-producing presence in their lives. They disclosed being plagued and trapped with procrastination; beaten, possessed or bound by it; afraid of waking up mornings for fear of again encountering its self-compressing, depressing weight in their lives at home, school or work. Constantly dealing with anxiety, confusion and distrust, each participant communicated daily struggles to complete tasks while experiencing significant cognitive, affective and behavioural pulls to the contrary. Relationships between themselves and their family, co-workers, peers or administrators frequently were compromised as a result. Repeatedly and inexplicably, they found interference and delay amidst desires to progress and succeed.

Participants acknowledged appreciating their motivational styles at times as perfectionistic and / or relative to deadlines. They understood these styles as differing markedly from those of non-procrastinating adults (Wedeman, 1985). Explaining differences as due in part to their perfectionistic standards, participants shared awareness that their own expectational sets often proved more inhibiting rather than supporting of their task completion efforts. Further describing themselves as being somehow stuck in "if it's worth doing - it's worth doing well" orientations, they expressed both contempt and envy toward non-procrastinating adults, faulting their finished work as often mediocre or shallow while wishing they enjoyed those early-begun and constantly pursued rhythms too.

Participants discussed their perception of time as being an important factor in task completion. When approaching a task, for the chronically procrastinating individual, initially time appeared unlimited and without boundaries which appeared related to low levels of anxiety. Good intentions to avoid or counter previous bouts with procrastination amongst participants when completing a task frequently helped to initially lower their anxiety levels. The individual may have initially attempted to place him or herself "in the right presence of mind" so as not to repeat previous procrastination patterns or cycles. Statements such as, "I know from my history that I procrastinate", "I'm not going to do it as I always have in the past", and "I'm not going to repeat this", "This time it's going to be different", "I'm going to do it differently this time", were commonplace. While this self-talk coping strategy may have initially been beneficial in decreasing rising levels of anxiety when an assigned task was not yet fully underway, it may also have provided the necessary escape or avoidance to delay the task further. Anxiety level was significantly decreased by utilizing this technique, and ample time was believed to be still available for successful completion of the task.

All participants indicated that when a complex task was assigned, they might attempt to avoid last minute panic by organizing a schedule in order to complete various parts of the task. Hence, each initially had very good intentions to avoid or counter procrastination when completing the assigned task. However, all tended to find any and all means of circumventing the necessary pressures that enabled them to complete the task. A time illusion or distortion was often created by the individual by completing mini tasks which resulted in a sense of accomplishment regardless of the fact that in actuality the originally assigned task had not completed.

A sense of accomplishment was created by completing little tasks such as doing the laundry or cutting the grass, anything that "feels good" in the moment, helping to reduce and temporarily control high levels of anxiety. Later, this pattern of behaviors used to reduce anxiety was misleading and had negative consequences for the procrastinator as he or she had not yet completed what needed to be accomplished, and time had continued to narrow to the deadline. By completing these alternative tasks, the procrastinator also continually circumvented their planned schedule in order to keep their anxiety under control. Compounding the sense of lack of accomplishment for not completing the procrastinators' assigned task or for not sticking to the self- imposed schedule was a severe increase in anxiety levels. A once functional behavior that reduced anxiety, becomes an aversive strategy to avoid task completion.

Implications of the Current Study

Knowledge gained from this study has implications for education, counselling, and enhancing our understanding of procrastination. Each of the adults contributing to this research expressed dissatisfaction with their dysfunctional achievement patterns, burdensome expectations, and negative performance determined self-image.

Educational Implications

Participants' disclosure of distorted time sense has major implications for performance in educational settings. Based upon these findings, situations involving external assignment deadlines and pre-task completion evaluations appear pertinent. Because these individuals indicated a tendency to frequently shift their task focus and completion deadlines, educators can, by consistently holding to assignment due dates, assure the chronically procrastinating individual that time will run out. When time extensions are not granted, learners are forced to confront the timeframe more realistically, thereby avoiding the incompatible cycle of anxiety reducing and anxiety producing extensions.

When and where indicated, pre-task completion assignment deadlines may also be established between educators and learners who tend to procrastinate. Mutually agreed-upon goal reviews could prove useful toward heightening self-awareness and assist in breaking the cycle of procrastination. Viewed as opportunities to support expectations, awareness, and progress, educators might also help to identify those factors triggering avoidance and postponement patterns and encourage efforts toward setting more concrete and realistic goals and study patterns.

It is also advisable that educators avoid personalizing non-completion and lateness and routinely monitor learner progress, deadlines and consequences. Additionally, it is important that educators let learners know that their worth transcends grades or performances. By amplifying traits as humour, initiative, creativity, kindness or caring, for example, educators may support learners' appreciation of themselves more constructively. Additionally, investigation of any potential learning disabilities that may hinder performance and task completion may be beneficial. By breaking the assigned task and its deadlines into smaller parts, educators would likely assist the learners in effectively addressing core issues related to procrastination.

Implications for Counselling

Understanding procrastination as a self-defeating behaviour with high levels of anxiety in individuals has several implications for counselling. First, all the participants expressed appreciation for being considered experts concerning their experiences and for receiving respect for their knowledge of the subject. The participants in this study implied that they gained some recognition, value, and acceptance by being regarded as the best source of information about their experience. As a counsellor intervention, acknowledging and respecting first-hand knowledge of procrastination can contribute to a sense of self-respect and power and, can potentially facilitate dealing more effectively with procrastination.

Second, participants in this study declared that they received benefit from reading and interpreting their own experience in its typed transcript form. While audio-taping and transcribing interviews would be time consuming and costly, counsellors can provide feedback of their experience to clients and invite them to join in interpreting that experience. Not only does this process respect the individual and what they offer in interpreting skills, but it allows the client to step out of their experience, no matter how briefly, to see it from another perspective. During the research process, several participants spoke of finding meaning in their experience that they had not considered before. This seems to imply that the process of describing, re-describing, and collaborating on interpretation may enhance the possibility of discerning meaning in that experience. Although, meaning can not be forced on the experience by the counsellor, it can emerge from the interaction of the procrastinating individual and the counsellor. This process lessens the power differential in counselling and respects the importance of procrastination in the individual.

Finally, the descriptive themes in this study may provide guidelines for counselling individuals who experience chronic procrastination. Each theme of Time, Deadlines, Avoidance, Expectations, Emotion, and Interpersonal Consequences represent areas of exploration that may be usefully pursued in counselling. Some individuals may find more importance or relevance in some themes than in others with respect to their experience. The participants in this study suggested that a combination of these themes is present in some variation in each experience with procrastination. However, exploration of these themes should remain sensitive to the unique voice that includes subtle nuances and variations of experience.

This study also has implications for counselling individuals who experience chronic procrastination. The discussion of each of these implications bears the imprints of "being-in-the-world", "being-in-the-study", and "being-the-interpreter" (Gadamer, 1976). Gadamer's (1976) hermeneutics has two implications for counselling individuals who experience chronic procrastination: 1) the experience is viewed in the context of the unique life of the individual, and, 2) our preconceptions of chronic procrastination are questioned to determine where and when they help us to understand the individual experience. A meaningful experience is more acceptable than a meaningless experience, and chronically procrastinating individuals will often present themselves and their experiences as meaningless or pointless. Gadamer (1976) suggests that any meaning of experience is connected to the internal perception of self, so it seems important that the counsellor remain open and sensitive to the person that is experiencing the chronic procrastination. By becoming aware of and sensitive to the unity of the individual's life, a counsellor may be able to reframe or redefine the individual's experience with procrastination in such a way that their procrastination becomes more meaningful and acceptable. It is important to remember that the participants in this study often presented themselves and their procrastination as unacceptable and undesirable. If a counsellor is able to facilitate a shift of perspective of procrastination to one of acceptance and value, it may help to open the door to accept and value themselves more as individuals.

Furthermore, Gadamer (1976) calls into question our preconceptions to determine "the true prejudices, by which we understand, from the false ones by which we misunderstand" (p. 266). As counsellors, we are vulnerable to preconceptions. When these preconceptions are assumed to be tantamount to understanding, in this case to procrastination, we open ourselves to misunderstanding the individual's experience. It seems that Gadamer implies that preconceptions should be held open to acceptance or rejection in light of the procrastinating individual's description of their experience. It is the experience described by the procrastinating individual that is the issue of counselling, and it is that experience that may enlighten our conceptions.

Consistent with the findings of Quarton (1992), the results of this study suggest that for clinicians working with clients on chronic procrastination concerns, one consideration may involve circumspection, or the client's ability to perceive procrastination in their relationships to affective arousals, expectational sets and tendencies. Developing circumspective awareness may facilitate related abilities toward anticipating and understanding potential procrastination hot spots. The likelihood of more task-focused and responsible, judgment-directed actions will be enhanced as a result.

Existential therapy may also be beneficial when working with chronically procrastinating individuals as it is concerned with the "I Am" (being) experience and the culture (world) in which a client lives. This "I Am" experience is not in itself a solution to an individual' problems. It is, rather, the precondition for the solution. Rollo May has written about many clients who are able to work through specific psychological problems after establishing the basis of their experience of being, "Since I Am, I have the right to be." (May et al., 1958; as cited in Corsini & Wedding, 1989, p. 364).

Beyond circumspective recognition, clinicians also may support client efforts toward achieving increased acceptance of limits and limitations. Clinicians working in the service of clients reaching individual understanding should ensure that clients take necessary steps toward exercising procedural responsibilities, or procrastination will continue. Toward acceptance of such responsibility, client reformulations may have to occur regarding expectational sets. For example, clients working to realize positive change and growth potential and more realistic recognition of reality-based capacities and limitations likely will confront and reduce existing perfectionistic styles. Such change processes require utmost patience and belief in the individual's ability and potential. Toward such positive ends, efforts bracketed upon advancing client experiential awareness are believed most useful.

Milgram (1998) and Ferrari et al. (1995) suggest that adult procrastination may have a different etiology than that typically found in students exhibiting apparently similar behavior. The differences between typical student procrastination and other forms require a broader treatment strategy, encompassing a number of additional therapeutic modalities. Whereas procrastination in college students is treated primarily with behavioral and cognitive methods, the use of an integration of therapeutic modalities may be useful with adults.

Increasing Public Awareness

Other implications of this study concern its value toward enhancing public awareness, understanding the pain of the procrastinating individual, and encouraging more deliberate efforts toward addressing the problem. Often, procrastinators are viewed simplistically and judged as people who prefer leading irresponsible lives, who could live productively if only they organized their efforts and ended their lazy, self-indulgent ways (Quarton, 1992). This view fails to appreciate the experiences these individuals have of themselves. It also neglects other contributing influences, such as family, school, or other life experiences. This view and statements such as "just do it" may be due in part to an expression of helplessness by others who do not fully appreciate or understand the pervasive nature of procrastination. Chronic procrastination is not merely limited to academic activities. It may lead to any responsibility being avoided and can encompass many aspects of the individual's life (Quarton, 1992).

Of the five adults in this study, it became clear that before their participation, four had not considered the full range of their experiences. This study deliberately examined procrastination and furthered the participants' recognition of common features, personal costs and contributing beliefs and practices, such as imagining it essential to do their best while somehow never quite believing themselves to be good enough. Viewing themselves as high striving, self-critical underachieving adults, participants nevertheless proved themselves to be articulate and educated, frustrated and confused, wanting to succeed, desiring change and hoping to benefit from the challenge derived from their participation to examine and define their experiences. Providing a portrait of the impact of procrastination on self-esteem and emotion, individual awareness and understanding may contribute toward more accurate perceptions, and more effective treatments, that may assist procrastinators to break out of their patterns.

With the exception of some cognitive-behavioural based, academically focused and time-limited group work programs on various university campuses, limited community awareness exists to support individual understanding, acceptance and remedial change processes. This study may provide a basis for greater public awareness of the seriousness of procrastination in the lives of individuals struggling to cope with the problem by promoting the study findings to various media outlets and by adding to the current literature on the topic. In educating mental health professionals about the seriousness and implications of procrastination, misdiagnosis might be more frequently avoided. Ferrari et al. (1995) report that misdiagnosis of chronic procrastination patterns occurs too frequently. A chronic procrastinator, a person with a clear longtime pattern of major task avoidance, may seek a consultation with a general practitioner, physician, or psychiatrist who will likely diagnose him or her as being depressed. Pharmacological treatment will likely be tried, but to no avail. Usually the client is referred for psychotherapy at this point. Even though therapy may be beneficial, the identified concern may lead to an expensive and potentially inappropriate treatment.

Although many individuals procrastinate until last minute deadlines motivate them into action, individuals who chronically procrastinate continue to "put things off" regardless of the consequences likely because the impact of starting or completing the task is more severe to them. Individual treatment and specialized attention are needed to address their anxieties and fears of failure. Overall, this study may become a catalyst for heightening social awareness and sensitivities toward individuals who chronically procrastinate.

Suggestions for Further Research

It may be beneficial if future research focused on an in depth experiential understanding of procrastination. To date, research in the field has primarily been restricted to quantitative research that attempted to construct instruments in order to examine procrastination without reference to participants' perception of the experience. Further studies may be directed toward taking the next step, examining the internal quality of procrastination in an attempt to expand our understanding of this very complex process.

Investigations into specific therapies and therapists with respect to the treatment of procrastination may also be beneficial. Different types of therapies and their effectiveness could be studied and compared by conducting open-ended interviews with "former procrastinators". If these individuals can be located, they may be able to provide insight into what type of therapy is effective in the treatment of procrastination, how and why this particular type of therapy helped, and what specifically was done during the treatment that was beneficial for the individual participating in it.

Therapists may also be interviewed in an attempt to investigate various practices in the treatment of procrastination. How therapists and clients evaluate the effectiveness of treatments for procrastination may also be an area for future research. Ferrari et. al (1995) also provide an in-depth discussion on considerations for future research in the area of procrastination. Milgram (1995) proposed that a national task force should be established to develop criteria for diagnosis, assessment, and treatment of procrastination disorders (similar to the operationally defined criteria found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manuals (DSM) for established psychiatric and behavioural disorders) (as cited in Ferrari et. al, 1995).

One particularly poignant finding of the current study concerned the inability of participants to end chronic procrastination patterns. This was consistent with the findings of Quarton (1992). Most participants revealed themselves as feeling helpless and self-critical against this difficulty - failing to see how they might move past procrastination's despair-producing presence in their lives. Performing anxiously, confused and distrusting, each communicated daily struggles to produce while experiencing significant cognitive, affective and behavioural pulls to the contrary. Relationships between themselves and their family, co-workers, peers or administrative others frequently were compromised as a result.

Another study, specifically addressing performance ideals, beliefs, standards and practices may positively amplify perfectionism's constancy, meaning and influence among chronic procrastinators. Contributing insight into their nick-of-time motivational bursts, such research also may prove insightful toward better understanding perfectionism's origins, attitudinal impacts on identity, self-concept and esteem levels and best strategies of address.

Counselling Psychology

Research to date suggests a relationship between procrastination and several different types of psychopathology (Ferrari et al., 1995). However, since studies regarding psychopathology have been primarily correlational and conducted at a single point in time, conclusions are limited. Longitudinal research is needed to solidify a claim of any causal relation. A promising line of inquiry involves research that evaluates procrastination as a symptom and a risk factor for future problems. Along similar lines, more research is needed to examine the extent to which task avoidance contributes to internal distress and interpersonal difficulties. Again, more sophisticated research designs are necessary to address complex difficulties associated with procrastination.

Individuals will continue to seek treatment for procrastination, and clinicians will continue to struggle with finding appropriate methods of intervention. It also appears at this time that we are far from developing satisfactorily effective treatment strategies (Ferrari et al., 1995). Because we know so little about this apparently distressing behavioural pattern, practitioners need to conduct outcome research regarding interventions designed to modify procrastination. It is doubtful that individual clinician / researchers will be able to establish definitive patterns from their interventions, simply because they do not identify and / or treat sufficient numbers of clients to draw valid conclusions (Ferrari et al., 1995). Nevertheless, there is no reason why research teams across sites such as within college counselling centers, hospitals, clinics, or private / group practice – could not pool data together in collaborative research efforts.

The Need for Basic Research

Ferrari et al. (1995) also suggest that "basic experimental and laboratory research regarding procrastination should be developed at an accelerated pace" (p. 243). Basic research needs to include the integration of theories from cognitive, social, personality, clinical, and physiological psychology to enhance our understanding of procrastination.

From what is known about the behaviors of procrastinators, a legitimate question is whether attentional aspects to stimulus cues can help explain aspects of procrastination behaviour. For example, it may well be that procrastinators have a greater susceptibility to distraction than non-procrastinators. If this is demonstrated, further questions would regard the contributory role of various stimuli, arousal states, and situational contexts. Questions such as these have not been examined in a systematic fashion.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of potential limitations inherent within any qualitative methodology. Grumeretz (1995) reported four possible limitations that Moustakas outlined regarding heuristics: "(1) A co-researcher (participant) may tell you what you expect to hear, or what he or she believes is a social expectancy. (2) Important meanings can register in silence, and are essential to a full understanding of an experience. Journals, drawings, and personal notes may be used to lessen obstacles to a true knowledge of an experience. (3) The same depth of information will not be obtained from every participant. Not all participants will be equally articulate, cooperative or comprehensive. (4) A way of circumventing the limits and establishing validity of heuristic data is to share the depiction of the experience (based on the recorded interview) with the co-researcher (participant) and have it confirmed or modified so that it is consistent with the co-researcher's (participant's) perception of the meaning and essence of the experience" (p. 52).

The first point concerns the potential for experimenter bias, which is sometimes called the "Pygamlion Effect" (Christmas, 1991, p. 141). This effect refers to the possibility that an experimenter will "hear what he or she wants to hear," or "see what he or she wants to see." This effect is demonstrated when subjects in an investigation provide the experimenter with the expected outcome. In this study, an attempt was made to avoid having a preconceived notion of the themes and categories. Without having predetermined hypotheses, a particular result was not expected or anticipated. Additional safeguards built into this study were as follows:

1. During the interviews, I established rapport with each participant and an attitude of acceptance. I believe that the participants felt comfortable to share their stories, as they perceived them to be, not as I wanted to hear them.
2. Each interview began with the same general question, and I probed as needed to get a comprehensive picture of each participant's experience. Although each participant was provided with an outline of the purpose of this study before the interview (see Appendix A), the interview itself proceeded in an informal conversational style until near the end. The questioning was intended to help all participants to thoroughly consider their experiences from their own frames of reference. In instances where I provided a summary of what I heard, and it was incorrect, participants were quick to

correct me. My perception was that I was told what the participants wished to convey to me.

The second possible limitation concerns the possibility that important meanings may not be articulated or missed in the analysis. Articulate participants were chosen. With myself as the primary researcher and five participants, there seems to be sufficient redundancy to suggest that important themes have been expressed and considered. The analysis is thorough and detailed, even though other perspectives or interpretations are certainly possible.

The third potential limitation concerns the cooperation, comprehensiveness, and verbal ability of each participant. Indeed, not all participants were equally articulate. However, participants were screened for their ability to speak in detail about this topic. Each participant chose to take part in this study and expressed a feeling of being honoured to participate. Furthermore, all participants returned the composite portrait to me that I drafted after making their own revisions. Comprehensiveness is best accomplished by continuing to interview participants until the point of saturation.

McCormack (1994) wrote, “Heuristic research is not replicateable [sic]. It is subjective and idiosyncratic” (p. 138). Participants are not randomly selected, for example, but instead were purposively chosen based upon availability. It is possible that another group of male and female adults would have different experiences of chronic procrastination. A limited number of repeated themes emerged as the participants were interviewed. The point of saturation was reached after actively looking for individuals who represented chronic procrastination.

The fourth point regarding limitations concerns the social and occupational homogeneity of the participants. All of the participants involved held middle class standings, and all but one maintained careers in some sector of the helping professions. Although this homogeneity likely contributed to the depth and breadth of interview data, it also may have biased the research results. A similar study of individuals self-identified as chronic procrastinators, drawn from a wider cross section of the adult population at large, could serve as validation for the current study.

Perhaps of greater importance is that even if these themes are only applicable to this sample, they represent the five people involved in this research. The primary purpose of this research was to study the personal and autobiographical aspects of peoples' experiences with chronic procrastination. The validity of this study was enhanced through the methodology followed, the careful attention to analysis, and the feedback from participants as to the accuracy of their descriptions and the themes.

Creative Synthesis

As was discussed in chapter three, the creative synthesis is the hallmark of heuristic journey: the whole being more than the sum of its parts. It can take many artistic forms but most commonly is presented as a narrative description. Whereas other qualitative methodologies end at something similar to the composite depiction, which is a comprehensive and generic integration of themes and meanings, the heuristic inquiry goes one step further by taking the researcher back into the self. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) suggested that the synthesis is "not a summary or recapitulation" (p. 52). The creative synthesis brings back the "I", the subjective "me", that has gone through the journey of exploring this phenomenon from start to finish. The synthesis reflects the impact.

The creative synthesis for this study is a recorded piece of instrumental music entitled, "The Experience of the Chronic Procrastinator" (Appendix D). This piece musically displays concepts and ideas that reflect my integration of the experience of chronic procrastination. Each instrumental track represents different components of the experience of chronic procrastination. Lead guitar and keyboard tracks represent the daily path of the procrastinator on and off task. Percussion and bass guitar tracks represent impending deadlines and the relentless drive to stay on task. Frequent breaks or changes in the piece represent the struggle for the chronic procrastinator to remain on task, and the repetitive nature symbolizes the cycle of the chronic procrastination experience. Finally, the laughing vocal effects at the end of the piece depict critical voices sometimes associated with the experience of chronic procrastination.

Final Reflections

The experience of chronic procrastination can be conceived of as a journey across time, traveled throughout in lonely isolation and intense self-doubt, and ending with little or no lasting satisfaction. At the beginning of a task, time may be imaged as elastic, forgiving, expansive, as more than enough or even too much, as something that can be wasted, frittered away, easily and casually lost track of or neglected without harm.

Later, time narrows and becomes more scarce, precious, pressuring, and forceful. Delays may then carry bodily reactions, such as heightened agitation, and anxiety. Time reaches a critical point of urgency as the deadline approaches, and alternative activities are minimized. Suddenly, an hour wasted is an hour lost. With no time left to lose, actions are more focused, performance risks more sustained, efficiency more heightened. It is important to note that this may not always occur resulting in devastating consequences.

Self-critical and demanding, individuals may grow impatient and frustrated during periods of procrastination. On edge, upset and oftentimes not wanting to reveal their burden, the chronic procrastinator may avoid or withdraw from close contact with others. They may share instances when they watched enviously or despairingly as others moved predictably ahead on schedule and time toward achievement. Noting themselves as more typically experiencing some degree of impasse due to the characteristic use of excuses, avoidance and evasion, their withdrawing was more readily understandable. Unlike non-procrastinators, being on time proves a dream long desired yet never quite realized. Becoming wrapped up in tangential diversions of little or no consequence, their hurry belies their paralysis. Inconsistent, easily distracted, impulsive, neglectful of the present, undisciplined and avoidant, chronic procrastinators lead a life promising much and generally delivering little.

My ability to understand the rhythmic nature of procrastination behaviours has increased my sense of control and options over this life pattern, with healthier responses being my most significant outcome. Identifying more experientially with my own problem, ending this work marks yet another starting point in my continuing growth and development. Slowly and deliberately reforming my priorities and standards, I am becoming more purposeful toward my primary aspirations: being a loving and caring husband and father, a genuine, loyal, and trustworthy friend, and a competent, responsible, and professional adult.

Each participant in this study expressed a desire to discuss the research findings. One requested that an ongoing group be created from our research experience. Others have expressed deep satisfaction in having participated, noting particular surprise and relief in their newfound realization that they were not alone with this problem. Aware of themselves as having similar issues and finding familiarity in their difficulties, the participants emerged more aware, wanting to improve themselves and holding greater hopefulness for their futures.

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Appendix A

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning and nature of the "inner experiences" of individuals self-defined as chronic procrastinators. It is being conducted as a Doctoral Dissertation by Erik Wikman under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Paulson from the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta.

Procrastination has occurred frequently over the past decades, but it has not been a subject of particular concern to researchers, clinicians, and the general public, and only recently has it begun to be well researched. The purpose of this study is to investigate the thoughts, feelings, and events that contribute to chronic procrastination in adults. In this study, individuals who believe that they experience chronic procrastination in their own lives will be interviewed by the researcher.

This study will address the question: "How do adults experience chronic procrastination?" The key terms of this inquiry are defined as:

1. Adults: Female or male individuals between the age of 19 and 65.

2. Experience: Those personal thoughts and feeling occurring in moments of awareness from the individual's point of view while encountering or contemplating the process of procrastination.

3. Chronic: Prolonged, recurrent - for a minimum of five years.

4. Procrastination: To put off taking action to a future time; to defer or postpone.

Each individual attributes meaning to important personal events, and has their own unique understanding of their world that contributed to their decision to engage in procrastination behavior. The point of view of the person most intimately involved, the procrastinator, is critical in developing a deeper understanding of procrastination as each individual has their own explanation and purposes for procrastinating in their life. The goal of the proposed research is to understand the meaning of the actions and experiences that lead up to procrastination behavior for each of the participants in this study. Participation in this study will require the willingness to discuss your perceptions and perspectives about your experience with the researcher with as much detail as possible.

Participants may benefit from this study by achieving a greater understanding of their procrastination through examining the impact it may have on their lives.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Appendix B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I am aware that the purpose of this study is to understand the experience of chronic procrastination in adults. Through interviews, I will be asked to describe my procrastination experiences in as much detail as possible. The study will be conducted as a Doctoral Dissertation by Erik Wikman under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Paulson from the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta.

I agree to participate in the study and to be interviewed about my experience with chronic procrastination. I understand that two interviews of about one to two hours will be tape recorded. I understand that participation in this study is strictly voluntary, agree that I have been given a comprehensive explanation of the purpose and nature of this research, and agree that I have had all relevant questions regarding the research answered by the researcher. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question, to end the interview, and/or withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. I am aware that there is a risk that in discussing my experiences, distressing feelings and memories may be triggered. If I indicate that I require the services of a counsellor, Erik Wikman will arrange to provide a list of resource persons that I might contact.

I understand that in order to assure confidentiality of personal information and anonymity, all audio tapes will be kept in a safe and secure location accessible to only the researcher. I will be referred to by pseudonym only in all written material that results from this study and details will be changed so as to make my identification impossible. Audio tapes will be destroyed once the study is completed. Transcripts will be maintained as confidential files. If they are to be used for any additional analysis in future research, separate ethical approval by an Ethics Committee will be required.

Any questions I have about the study at any time will be answered by Erik Wikman (phone 492-3746) or Dr. Barbara Paulson, supervisor of the project (492-5298). I also understand that at my request, the results of the study will be discussed with me when completed.

On the basis of the above information, I ________________________________ agree to participate in the above study.

______________________________	______________________________
Signature of Participant	Date
______________________________	______________________________
Witness	Date

Appendix C

LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I had the following list of questions available at each interview. At the end of the unstructured part of an interview, I referred to these questions and asked those that I thought were still appropriate to ask:

1. I want to understand your experience with chronic procrastination. In other words, tell me the story of how you became a procrastinator.

Past Focus

2. Describe the difficult or bad times you experienced as related to procrastination. What thoughts, feelings, and body sensations are associated with these memories?

3. Describe the positive or good times you experienced as related to procrastination. What thoughts, feelings, and body sensations are associated with these memories?

4. What have you gone through to get where you are now as a procrastinator?

5. Have you ever had the experience of being harassed that you thought was related to your tendency to procrastinate? If so, how did you handle each instance?

6. Provide an example of a time when you were challenged as related to your procrastination.

7. Did you (or do you) have a procrastinator as a role model? Who taught you how to be a procrastinator?

8. What has been the reaction of your family and friends as related to your procrastination?

Present Focus

9. What criteria do you use in defining yourself as a chronic procrastinator?

10. Are there any issues (thoughts, feelings, conflicts, fears, problems, aspirations, and so forth) that are new to you where you are now as related to your procrastination?

11. How do you manage the stigma of being a procrastinator?

12. What do you believe is the hallmark of being a procrastinator?

13. What is most important to you presently about being a procrastinator?

14. What meaning (if any) does being a procrastinator have for you?

15. Upon reflection, is there a metaphor or image that really speaks to your experience with procrastination?

Future Focus

16. What would you be like if you were functioning optimally? What still needs to develop or happen for you? What steps will you need to take to get you there?

17. What is either slowing you down or holding you back from taking the next step?

18. What gives you hope and keeps you going?

19. What changes need to happen to society?

Last Question

22. Do you think that we have dealt with this topic thoroughly? Is there anything else that you feel is important for me to know?

Appendix D

CREATIVE SYNTHESIS

A recorded piece of instrumental music entitled, "The Experience of the Chronic Procrastinator".